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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/25 China: Covid peak: 7M/day, 4K deaths/day
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-peak-covid-infections-exceeded-7-million-daily-deaths-more-than-4000-2023-01-25/

GIST	<p>HONG KONG, Jan 25 (Reuters) - China's daily new COVID-19 infections hit a peak of more than 7 million per day around Dec. 22, while deaths reached a daily peak of more than 4,000 on Jan. 4, the country's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention said on Wednesday.</p> <p>The figures, published on the centre's website, come after a prominent government scientist said over the weekend that 80% of China's 1.4 billion population have already been infected, making the possibility of a big COVID-19 rebound over the next two or three months remote.</p> <p>"Around December 22, 2022, the number of infected people and the number of fever outpatient consultations reached a peak," it said with the number of new infections "exceeding 7 million per day and the number of daily fever outpatient consultations peaking at 2.867 million".</p> <p>China has passed the peak of COVID patients in fever clinics, emergency rooms and with critical conditions, a National Health Commission official said last week.</p> <p>Nearly 60,000 people with COVID had died in hospital as of Jan. 12, roughly a month after China abruptly dismantled its strict zero-COVID policy, according to government data.</p> <p>But some experts said that figure probably vastly undercounts the full impact, as it excludes those who die at home and because many doctors have said they are discouraged from citing COVID as a cause of death.</p> <p>Return to Top</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Report: much of Africa less safe, secure
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-mo-ibrahim-africa-covid-c011bb478909012c555d5b0e8e7f3eb3
GIST	<p>DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — A new report on African governance released Wednesday finds much of the continent is “less safe, secure and democratic” than it was 10 years ago, citing a surge in military coups and armed conflicts.</p> <p>The democratic backsliding now threatens to reverse decades of progress made in Africa, according to an index of governance compiled by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation that notes 23 successful and attempted coups since 2012.</p> <p>“This phenomenon of coup d’états that was common in the ’80s seems to have become fashionable again in certain parts of Africa,” said Ibrahim, a British billionaire born in Sudan who is using his fortune to promote democracy and political accountability in Africa.</p> <p>His foundation’s report cited eight successful coups just since 2019. Mali and neighboring Burkina Faso have seen two each during that time, further destabilizing a part of the world already under siege by Islamic militants.</p> <p>The report’s authors also found overall security problems pervasive: Over the past decade, nearly 70% of Africans saw security and rule of law decrease in their countries, they said. More than 30 countries declined in this category, according to the index.</p> <p>South Sudan ranked at the bottom, followed by Somalia, Eritrea, Congo, Sudan, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Burundi, Libya and Equatorial Guinea.</p> <p>Government violence against civilians and political unrest increased across Africa since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the report says, with governments using restrictions to clamp down on dissent.</p> <p>“Although this trend predates the pandemic, existing antidemocratic tendencies have been accelerated by the introduction of restrictive measures and emergency provisions that have been left in place for an extended time period,” it said.</p>

	The index did chart improvements in some economic, education and gender equity categories, Ibrahim said. However, the report only analyzed data through the end of 2021 so did not take into account the full impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic.
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HEADLINE	01/25 Classified records conundrum
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/biden-trump-classified-documents-president-33df0355c72e9ae8fa4cb6ead13f6521?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_07
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — At least three presidents. A vice president, a secretary of state, an attorney general. The mishandling of classified documents is not a problem unique to President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump.</p> <p>The matter of classified records and who, exactly, has hung onto them got more complicated Tuesday as news surfaced that former Vice President Mike Pence also had such records in his possession after he left office. Like Biden, Pence willingly turned them over to authorities after they were discovered during a search he requested, according to his lawyer and aides.</p> <p>The revelations have thrust the issue of proper handling of documents — an otherwise low-key Washington process — into the middle of political discourse and laid bare an uncomfortable truth: Policies meant to control the handling of the nation’s secrets are haphazardly enforced among top officials and rely almost wholly on good faith.</p> <p>It’s been a problem off and on for decades, from presidents to Cabinet members and staff across multiple administrations stretching as far back as Jimmy Carter. The issue has taken on greater significance since Trump willfully retained classified material at his Florida estate, prompting the unprecedented FBI seizure of thousands of pages of records last year.</p> <p>It turns out former officials from all levels of government discover they are in possession of classified material and turn them over to the authorities at least several times a year, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of classified documents.</p> <p>Current and former officials involved in the handling of classified information say that while there are clear policies for how such information should be reviewed and stored, those policies are sometimes pushed aside at the highest levels. Teams of national security officials, secretaries and military aides who share responsibility for keeping top-level executives informed — and the executives themselves — may bend the rules for convenience, expediency or sometimes due to carelessness.</p> <p>It’s a contrast to the more rigid way the procedures are followed across the wider intelligence community, where mishandling information could be grounds for termination, a security clearance revocation or even prosecution.</p> <p>“Executives go back and forth to their house with documents and read them. They read them at night, they bring them back,” said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va. He contrasted that pattern for top officials to senators, who are required to retain classified materials in secure rooms at the Capitol.</p> <p>“I can see how this happens,” he added. “But again, every situation is different. They are all very serious. So, how many? How serious? How did you get them? Who had access to them? Are you being cooperative? And the same set of questions has to be answered with respect to Pence and with President Biden and President Trump.”</p> <p>As for the judiciary, a separate federal law, the Classified Information Procedures Act, governs the handling of material that comes before judges in criminal prosecutions and civil lawsuits. Another law</p>

deals with foreign intelligence investigations that come before a special court that operates in secrecy. Both laws are intended to guard against the disclosure of classified information.

While Trump intended to keep the documents — he’s argued, in apparent disregard of the Presidential Records Act, that they were his personal property — he was hardly the first president to mishandle classified information.

Former President Jimmy Carter found classified materials at his home in Plains, Georgia, on at least one occasion and returned them to the National Archives, according to the same person who spoke of regular occurrences of mishandled documents. The person did not provide details on the timing of the discovery.

An aide to the Carter Center provided no details when asked about that account of Carter discovering documents at his home after leaving office in 1981. It’s notable that Carter signed the Presidential Records Act in 1978 but it did not apply to records of his administration, taking effect years later when Ronald Reagan was inaugurated. Before Reagan, presidential records were generally considered the private property of the president individually. Nonetheless, Carter invited federal archivists to assist his White House in organizing his records in preparation for their eventual repository at his presidential library in Georgia.

The National Archives declined to comment when asked to provide a list of times that classified documents were turned over to the agency by former officials.

Meanwhile, other former senior U.S. officials have insisted they have always appropriately handled classified materials. A spokesman for former Vice President Dick Cheney said he didn’t leave office with classified materials and none have been discovered at any point since. Freddy Ford, a spokesman for former President George W. Bush, told The Associated Press that “all presidential records — classified and unclassified — were turned over to NARA upon leaving the White House,” referring to the National Archives and Records Administration.

A spokesperson for President Barack Obama didn’t comment but pointed to a 2022 statement from the National Archives that the agency took control of all of Obama’s records after he left office and was “not aware of any missing boxes of Presidential records from the Obama administration.” Former President Bill Clinton’s office said, “All of President Clinton’s classified materials were properly turned over to NARA in accordance with the Presidential Records Act.”

The closing days of any presidency are chaotic, as aides sort through years of their bosses’ accumulated materials to determine what must be turned over to the archives and what may be retained. Different teams of individuals are responsible for clearing different offices and maintaining consistent standards can prove challenging, officials said.

In Pence’s case, the material found in the boxes came mostly from his official residence at the Naval Observatory, where packing was handled by military aides rather than staff lawyers. Other material came from a West Wing office drawer, according to a Pence aide who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the discovery. The boxes were taped shut and were not believed to have been opened since they were packed, the person said.

There have also been accusations of mishandled documents while officials were still on the job. Former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales took home highly sensitive documents that dealt with the National Security Agency’s terrorist surveillance program and the terrorist detainee interrogation program in the late 2000s. Hillary Clinton was investigated for mishandling classified information via a private email server she used as secretary of state.

But rarely are officials punished for these mistakes. That’s in large part because, while federal law does not allow anyone to store classified documents in an unauthorized location, it’s only a prosecutable crime when someone is found to have “knowingly” removed the documents from a proper place.

	<p>Mishandled documents are often returned with little fanfare or national news coverage. And there is no one reason for why records are mishandled, as the process of presidential records management plays out amid the chaos at the end of a presidential term and is based mostly a good-faith agreement between the archives and the outgoing administration.</p> <p>“The National Archives has historically worked under an honor system with any administration,” said Tim Naftali, the first director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. “They work for the president and the vice president and they have partnerships with all these former presidents and vice presidents.”</p> <p>The White House counsel’s office declined to comment Tuesday on whether Biden would order a review of how classified documents are handled across the government in response to the latest discoveries.</p> <p>The power to change or amend how classified documents are handled rests largely with the president. Biden, who is actively under investigation, is not likely to instigate a review or order any changes in procedure because it could be seen as a political move meant to better his own circumstances.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 DHS: daily border encounters drop in Jan
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/24/politics/border-encounters-january-dhs/index.html
GIST	<p>WashingtonCNN — Daily migrant encounters along the US-Mexico border have dropped by more than half in January compared to last month, a Homeland Security official tells CNN, citing the expansion of a Trump-era Covid restriction and recently launched programs to legally migrate to the US.</p> <p>Last month, border authorities wrestled with a spike in border encounters, averaging around 7,000 daily, ahead of the anticipated end of Title 42, a public health authority that’s been in place since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>The Supreme Court put a temporary hold on the termination of Title 42, leaving it in place for now. But the migrant influx underscored the challenges facing the Biden administration amid mass migration in the Western Hemisphere. While daily arrests have dropped, it’s unclear how long the trend will hold as people continue to face poor conditions in their home countries.</p> <p>Over the course of his presidency, Joe Biden has faced changing migration patterns that have stretched federal and local resources. The issue in turn has increasingly become a political vulnerability for the administration – drawing fierce criticism from Republicans and Democrats – and been a key point of discussion with nations to the south, primarily Mexico.</p> <p>Biden met with Mexican President Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for the North American Leaders’ Summit earlier this month, where migration was a key topic of discussion.</p> <p>Just days before the visit to Mexico, the Biden administration expanded a humanitarian parole program to accept up to 30,000 migrants per month from Haiti, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba. The program provides a legal pathway for those nationalities to enter the US instead of crossing the border. The administration also made those nationalities eligible for Title 42, meaning they can now be turned away by authorities if they don’t apply for the program.</p> <p>Officials have cited the parole program and expansion of Title 42 as among the reasons for the drop in daily encounters this month.</p> <p>Biden alluded to a potential drop in crossings while in Mexico, saying: “This is going to reduce the number of people legally trying to cross — illegally trying to cross the border.”</p>

	<p>“We’re trying to make it easier for people to get here, opening up the capacity to get here, but not have them go through that godawful process,” he added, referring to the treacherous journey north migrants often take.</p> <p>Immigrant advocates, though, have shared concerns about the program, arguing that it may only serve those with connections to the US since a sponsor is needed and because it means more people can be turned away under Title 42.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 DHS stops air marshals to border missions
SOURCE	https://www.judicialwatch.org/dhs-stops-sending-air-marshals-on-migrant-missions/
GIST	<p>Thanks to pressure from the Air Marshal National Council and Judicial Watch’s reporting, the Biden administration will stop sending Federal Air Marshals (FAM) to the Mexican border to provide illegal immigrants with welfare checks, transportation, and other basic services. The reckless practice left aircraft at risk by sending 150-200 FAM monthly to the southern border to help deal with “a surge in irregular migration.” Judicial Watch was the first to report on the deployments in late October when the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) sent an electronic memorandum to the highly skilled law enforcement officers informing them of the assignments, which consisted of 21-day rotations that could be extended for up to 120 days.</p> <p>Judicial Watch obtained a copy of the directive from various recipients at the agency, which operates under the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), created after 9/11 to prevent another terrorist attack. FAM are charged with protecting commercial passenger flights by deterring and countering the risk of terrorist activity, yet they were plucked from their duties to babysit illegal aliens. “The nation is experiencing a surge in irregular migration along the Southwest Border (SWB),” the October notice to FAM officers read. “The unprecedented volume of Noncitizen Migrants (NCMs) currently apprehended mandates immediate further action to protect the life and safety of federal personnel and noncitizens in CBP [Customs and Border Protection] custody.”</p> <p>The first wave of air marshals was dispatched to El Paso, Texas and Yuma, Arizona on October 30 for an October 31 start. Thirty officers and a supervisor went to El Paso, 15 officers and a supervisor to Yuma. Here is the important work that the specially trained law enforcement officers were doing on the southern border rather than their critical duty of protecting commercial planes flagged for terrorist threats. “Hospital Watch, Transportation, Law Enforcement Searches, Entry Control, Security at CBP Facilities and Welfare Checks.” In a formal complaint to the DHS Inspector General, the Air Marshal National Council, which represents thousands of FAM nationwide, accused TSA Administrator David Pekoske and FAM Director Tirrell Stevenson of violating federal law and overstepping their authority by assigning air marshals to assist the U.S. Border Patrol with the illegal immigration crisis. The complaint also accused Homeland Security leaders of fraud, waste, and abuse of authority.</p> <p>Earlier this month when an intelligence alert disclosed that Al Qaeda is planning attacks in the U.S. involving planes, the Air Marshal National Council fired off a letter to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas as well as Pekoske and Stevenson reminding them that deploying FAM to the southern border to perform humanitarian work is reckless and putting the nation at extreme risk. Judicial Watch published a story about the threat after obtaining a copy from government sources of the intelligence alert, which was delivered on December 31, 2022, at 12:23:52 Greenwich Mean Time. The caption of the widely circulated warning reads: “Al-Qaeda says upcoming attacks on US, possibly involving planes, will use new techniques and tactics.”</p> <p>It appears that the combined efforts of Judicial Watch and the Air Marshal National Council have squeezed the Biden administration to end the controversial border missions. A memo dispersed to FAM just days ago says that all future deployments to the southwest border (SWB) have been suspended until further notice. “Wave #5 will continue their deployment until January 27th and then travel home as planned on January 28th,” according to the notice provided to Judicial Watch by various government sources. “Wave #6 will NOT DEPLOY as planned on January 25th.” The missive directs FAM to cancel</p>

	travel and informs officers that hotel and car rental reservations will be cancelled by the agency. Air marshals nationwide are thrilled that they can return to their critical mission of securing the nation's transportation system and David Londo, president of the Air Marshal National Council, said "it looks like we won."
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HEADLINE	01/24 UN: armed groups create misery in Mali
SOURCE	https://www.barrons.com/amp/news/armed-groups-creating-misery-in-mali-un-representative-01674583508
GIST	<p>Armed groups in northern Mali are creating misery in the vacuum left by French troops' withdrawal, with the protracted crisis causing international "fatigue", the UN refugee agency's representative in the country said Tuesday.</p> <p>On the heels of a military coup in 2020 that saw the troubled west African state bring in Russian paramilitaries, France withdrew the last of its soldiers in November, ending its long-running Barkhane anti-jihadist operation.</p> <p>"Since the departure of Barkhane and European troops, there is a vacuum," Mohamed Toure told reporters in Geneva, via video link from Mali, following a mission to the north to meet freshly displaced people.</p> <p>"We don't have any state authorities in that region, so it's really left in the hands of terrorist armed groups which are spreading terror, killings, rapes, creating misery.</p> <p>"Mass displacement has been noticed," including refugees from other countries forced to move again, he added.</p> <p>"We can be very, very concerned about the fact that we are seeing every day people fleeing the theatre of conflict."</p> <p>Mali has been in the throes of a nearly 11-year security crisis triggered by a regional revolt in the north that developed into a full-blown jihadist insurgency.</p> <p>Thousands have died, hundreds of thousands have fled their homes and devastating economic damage has been inflicted on one of the world's poorest countries.</p> <p>Toure said the situation was becoming a forgotten crisis, with the world seemingly suffering from "Mali fatigue".</p> <p>"We are really seeing a diminishing, drastically, of the assistance provided to internally displaced people and refugees."</p> <p>At the end of 2022, Mali hosted more than 60,000 refugees, including 25,000 from Burkina Faso, said Toure. Meanwhile, some 440,000 Malians remain internally displaced due to continued violence and threats from armed groups.</p> <p>"The needs of the displaced remain enormous," he said.</p> <p>Toure appealed for greater international solidarity for the displaced, through urgent financial support for humanitarian organisations.</p> <p>Several countries have accused Mali's ruling junta of using the services of the pro-Kremlin Wagner mercenary group, which Bamako denies.</p> <p>Toure said some people fleeing the conflict zones were reporting seeing "foreign troops involved" in attacks but he was not in a position to determine what their affiliation was.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 NSA unprecedented hiring effort in 2023
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/intelligence/nsa-launches-unprecedented-hiring-effort-in-2023/
GIST	<p>Seeking to grow its workforce in 2023, NSA is undertaking one of its largest hiring surges in 30 years with openings for over 3,000 new employees.</p> <p>NSA's unique foreign signals intelligence and cybersecurity missions offer U.S. citizens extraordinary opportunities to serve in a wide variety of skill fields including computer science, cybersecurity, math, data science, engineering, intelligence analysis, language analysis, communications, business and accounting. Opportunities are available for entry, mid, and senior level professionals.</p> <p>"As NSA shifts to an era of strategic competition, it is critical that we're able to build and sustain the diverse and expert workforce we need to continue working our missions," said NSA Executive Director Catherine Auccella.</p> <p>NSA is committed to its world-class workforce and provides benefits and opportunities that foster both career development and work-life balance. Along with a generous federal benefits package, including retirement and paid time off, NSA also offers relocation assistance, robust well-being services, and extensive development opportunities such as college tuition assistance programs, professional training programs, and the opportunity to attend the National Cryptologic University.</p> <p>If you are interested in serving with a purpose, prepared to tackle the toughest national security challenges, and eager to collaborate with experts across the Intelligence Community, industry and academia, apply online at www.intelligencecareers.gov/nsa. Vacancy announcements are posted frequently.</p> <p>Find and register for in person and virtual, "NSALive" recruitment events at www.intelligencecareers.gov/nsa/events to learn more about NSA's mission and career opportunities.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Classified information in the US
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2023-01-24/explainer-the-what-why-how-much-and-how-often-behind-classified-information-in-the-u-s
GIST	<p>Leaders in the new Republican-controlled House of Representatives have seized on reports that classified documents were found at President Joe Biden's personal residence and at a university think tank tied to him, eager to equate the revelations with the ongoing federal investigation into highly sensitive documents that former President Donald Trump had at his Mar-a-Lago compound.</p> <p>Both instances led the Justice Department to launch special counsel investigations to establish the circumstances behind the taking and the returning of the materials – but not before opponents on each side of the political spectrum sought to use the discoveries as proof of wrongdoing.</p> <p>Biden supporters insist that the investigations will show that the president, unlike his predecessor, followed procedures for addressing what was an accidental – and not uncommon – mishandling of classified documents, unlike Trump and his surrogates, who have sought to frame the entire episode as evidence of a government-sponsored smear campaign.</p> <p>But the more recent discovery of such materials at the home of former Vice President Mike Pence suggests the phenomenon is more widespread than previously thought. And while little is known about the nature of the materials recovered in all of the cases, the speculation over what they might include has cast new light on what types of materials get classified, what agencies classify them, why, and for how long?</p> <p>What Type of Information Is Classified?</p> <p>"Classified" information refers commonly to documents but also could apply to maps, images, videos, data, microfilms, computer hard drives, CDs or any other medium that an element of the U.S. government</p>

wishes to shield from public access. Presidents are technically in charge of managing the system of classifying information, though in practice the government agency that created or received the information, such as the CIA or the Department of Energy, oversees its classification and protection.

The contents of the classified information could be raw intelligence, personnel information, an assessment from some element of American national security or correspondence among analysts, intelligence-gatherers or decision-makers. It could also include procedures, such as the process and codes for launching America's arsenal of nuclear weapons – among the country's most guarded secrets and generally the subject of the first questions that government investigations and public speculation seek to answer about known security breaches.

The earliest examples of classification in the U.S. government date back to sessions of the First Continental Congress, which in 1774 adopted a resolution under "obligations of honor, to keep the proceedings secret until the majority shall direct them to be made public." George Washington himself in 1790 sent an update to Congress on negotiations with certain Indian tribes with the explicit notation that the information contained "confidential communications."

The first peacetime procedures for classification within the civilian government were disseminated in 1869, and the system currently in place began during the lead-up to World War II.

Why Is Information Classified and How Many Different Levels of Classification Are There?

In order for anything to become classified, it must first receive an official determination from a government agency that the release of its contents would damage U.S. national security and must, therefore, become only accessible to those who have appropriate clearance. The extent to which it would harm national security relates to the level of classification it receives, with "top secret" as the highest, followed by "secret" and then "confidential," the lowest level of classification. Each of the levels can also receive further classifications depending on the type of sensitive information the government wishes to protect, such as "sensitive compartmented information" or SCI, in which only parts of a program are accessible at once, or NOFORN, a restriction on information that only Americans, not foreigners, can see.

Though the classification system is designed to protect information that upon release is known to harm American national security, in practice that is not always the case, perhaps even rarely so, as agencies that generate classified information often have a process for deeming it as such automatically without a clear plan for eventually declassifying it.

One estimate in 2010 – at a time the Obama administration attempted to follow through on pledges of transparency – assessed that as much as 90 percent of classified information did not need to be so at that time, or ever. The proliferation of digitally produced classified information in the time since then leads experts to believe that number now could be in excess of 95 or even 99 percent.

Do Classification Rules Change Between Agencies?

Each government agency is responsible for what information it chooses to classify and how, though all of them follow common procedures. The practices include a cover sheet that fronts the classified documents and markings that appear at the top of every page to make clear the classification applied to them.

Various agencies have different ways in which employees and staff can access classified information. Junior and mid-level officials or military personnel, for example, may only be allowed to see such materials in a SCIF, or sensitive compartmented information facility, which houses the materials and usually comes with clear procedures for gaining access – such as that entrants must leave cellphones outside and also enter and leave empty-handed.

In other circumstances, such as for senior decision-makers like an agency director, Cabinet secretary or the president himself, staffers responsible for caring for the materials may bring them to and from their offices for briefings or to review.

Yet everyone who has access to these materials receives broad training on handling them and then must also be “read in” to a particular program or access, in which a specialized official dictates its own terms of security.

The cover sheets and subsequent markings for classified materials are immediately recognizable to anyone who has been granted a security clearance.

How Many Documents Are Classified Each Year?

Most practitioners and observers would say too much. Some estimates assess that as many as 50 million documents or more are classified each year.

The number appears to have grown incrementally in the last 20 years between the proliferation of technology in the Information Age that can generate classified information as well as the two-decade period in which the U.S. waged active wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while also defending against threats from nation-state actors across the globe.

Beyond the clear procedures for generating classified information, the practical realities for protecting it by presidents and down the chains of command are not always clear.

Accidental leaks, including when the staff of a retiring senior leader transports bulk documents from a secure facility into storage, happen so regularly that the National Archives has [a startlingly matter-of-fact set of instructions](#) for such instances on its public website – aligned with the actions reportedly taken by members of Biden’s staff when they believed they had made such a discovery at his archive and his private residence.

Is There a Process for Declassifying Information?

Though some classified materials become more broadly accessible after a particular amount of time under orders from a government authority – including the president – there is no clear, uniform path for a piece of secret information to become public.

Part of the problem is that there is no official within the U.S. government whose sole job is to work on safely declassifying materials. It is always an ancillary responsibility of an agency’s staff. Add to that, concerns about prematurely declassifying information are common – as demonstrated by the quip that nobody has ever been fired from the government for keeping materials secret.

Many classified items become declassified after a set period, often 25 years, as is the case for the Justice Department’s “automatic declassification” protocols. However, several exemptions to that process exist for all government agencies, such as if declassifying the information could reveal the identity of confidential human intelligence sources or their cooperation with the U.S. government or if the information could lead to the development of weapons of mass destruction or for anything that would undermine state-of-the-art U.S. weaponry.

In other cases, a government authority may set a deadline for determining whether currently classified information must remain so. President Joe Biden ordered a review of the roughly 16,000 remaining files on President John F. Kennedy’s assassination and mandated their public release “except when the strongest possible reasons counsel otherwise.”

More than 70% of the subsequent documents were cleared for declassification, and the National Archives released thousands of them in mid-December.

According to the National Archives, since World War II only three subjects remain immune from consideration for declassification: National Security Agency signals intelligence from before 1942, how the Secret Service guards the president and how much gold is at the federal bullion depository at Fort Knox.

The need for classifying information can also change over time. The process for launching nuclear weapons, for example, will likely always remain secret.

On the other end of the spectrum, those who have worked with highly classified information lament how quickly the need to guard it can diminish. Consider the difference between protecting a plan for a U.S. infantry company to patrol through a particular village in a valley in Afghanistan the following day compared to the need to restrict that same information a year or even a month later.

Yet information about routine operations can quickly change with regard to the need to keep it classified. It took an act of Congress, for example, to cajole the Pentagon and intelligence communities to work toward declassifying what had originated as mundane footage – chiefly from military pilots – [that was later revealed to show apparent UFOs](#), which the government calls Unidentified Aerial Phenomena in an apparent attempt to avoid otherworldly associations.

In these particular instances, the government was [concerned that declassifying the footage](#) prematurely could reveal “sources and methods” – bureaucratic jargon to describe the secret ways it gathers information, either electronically or through human sources. They were also concerned that the footage may have shown previously undisclosed experimental technology from another government, such as China or Russia, and the U.S. – as is often the case with intelligence – did not want its adversaries to know what it knew.

More than a year after Congress ordered the military and intelligence community to begin practicing transparency what it knows, they have yet to reveal any definitive conclusions about their analysis, with many experts [questioning whether they ever will](#).

What Role Does the President Play in the Classification Process?

Since the beginning of World War II, the president of the United States has officially overseen the system for classifying information through a series of executive orders. The most recent is former President Barack Obama’s 2009 order that, among other reforms, created the National Declassification Center inside the National Archives in an attempt to coordinate the process across the government.

Presidents have the authority to issue classification and to designate other officials who can do so. They also have authority to declassify much information – but not all. They cannot, for example, declassify information regarding the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

[Legal scholars disagree](#) on the extent to which a president may declassify information without following the strict rules governing that process. And in light of the politicization the discussion has recently taken due to the incidents involving Trump and Biden, the answer about adherence to those procedures will likely become a matter of much consideration – and perhaps even litigation – in the near future.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Peru security forces tear gas protesters
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/peru-protesters-tear-gassed-after-president-calls-for-truce/
GIST	<p>LIMA, Peru (AP) — Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Peru’s capital and were met with volleys of tear gas and pellets amid clashes with security forces just hours after President Dina Boluarte called for a “truce” in almost two months of protests.</p> <p>The antigovernment protest Tuesday was the largest – and most violent — since last Thursday, when large groups of people, many from remote Andean regions, descended on the capital to demand Boluarte’s resignation, immediate elections and the dissolution of Congress.</p> <p>“We can’t have a truce when she doesn’t tell the truth,” Blanca España Mesa, 48, said of Peru’s president. Even though her eyes were watering from the tear gas, España Mesa said she was “happy because a lot of people came today. It’s as if people have woken up.”</p>

Before last week, most of the large antigovernment protests that followed the ouster of President Pedro Castillo took place in remote regions of Peru, largely in the country's south, exposing deep division between residents of the capital and the long-neglected countryside.

The crisis that has sparked Peru's worst political violence in more than two decades began when Castillo, Peru's first leader from a rural Andean background, tried to short-circuit the third impeachment proceeding of his young administration by ordering Congress dissolved on Dec. 7. Lawmakers impeached him instead, the national police arrested him before he could find sanctuary and Boluarte, who was his vice president, was sworn in.

Since then, 56 people have died amid the unrest involving Castillo's supporters, 45 of whom died in direct clashes with security forces, according to Peru's ombudsman. None of the deaths have been in Lima.

On Tuesday, police fired round after round of tear gas as they blocked the passage of protesters, who seemed more organized than before. The smell of tear gas permeated the air and could be felt even a block away as people leaving work suddenly had to cover their faces to try to diminish the sting.

"Murderers," yelled the protesters, some of whom threw rocks at the police.

Even after most of the protesters had left, police continued firing tear gas to disperse small groups of people in a plaza in front of the country's Supreme Court.

"I have a right to protest in this country," Emiliano Merino, 60, said as he was being treated by volunteer paramedics after pellets grazed each of his arms.

Boluarte had earlier called for a truce and blamed protesters for the political violence that has engulfed the country, claiming in a news conference that illegal miners, drug traffickers and smugglers formed a "paramilitary force" to seek chaos for political gain. She said numerous road blockades across the country and damage to infrastructure have cost the country more than \$1 billion in lost production.

She suggested that the protesters who died with bullet wounds were shot by other demonstrators, claiming investigations will show their injuries are incompatible with the weapons officers carry. And meanwhile, some 90 police officers are hospitalized with bruises, she said: "What about their human rights?" the president asked.

The government has not presented evidence that any of the injured officers were struck by gunfire.

Human rights advocates say they are dismayed by the lack of international outcry from the regional and global community and are calling for condemnation of the state violence unleashed since Castillo's impeachment.

Jennie Dador, executive secretary of Peru's National Human Rights Coordinator, said the lack of international response makes it feel like "we're alone."

"None of the states in the region have done anything concrete," she said.

Boluarte was notably absent from a meeting of regional leaders Tuesday in Argentina's capital, where most avoided mention of the civilian deaths in Peru.

Human rights activists have acknowledged acts of violence by some protesters — including efforts to take over airports and burn police stations — but say the demonstrations have largely been peaceful.

Some of the leaders at the summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States did blame Peru's government for the violence.

	<p>Chile's President Gabriel Boric said there's "an urgent need for a change in Peru because the result of the path of violence and repression is unacceptable." Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a staunch supporter of Castillo, demanded an "end to the repression."</p> <p>During the summit's closing ceremony, Argentina's President Alberto Fernández called for an end to "street violence and institutional violence that has taken the lives of so many people" in Peru.</p> <p>"The international community has expressed concern, but really I think it could be more forceful," said César Muñoz, associate director of the Americas division at Human Rights Watch.</p> <p>After some feverish closed-door negotiations in Buenos Aires in the afternoon, the situation in Peru was left out of the summit's closing documents. "Peru is a prickly issue," but pressure from some leaders had led to last-minute negotiations, said an official in Argentina's Foreign Ministry, speaking on condition of anonymity for lack of authority to discuss policy.</p> <p>"Peru has managed to fly under the radar," said Marina Navarro, executive director of Amnesty International Peru. "Given the gravity of the situation, with this number of people who have died, we don't see as much said about it as there could be."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Putin seeks US weapons left for Taliban?
SOURCE	https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/putin-in-negotiation-with-taliban-to-procure-us-arms-in-exchange-for-recognition-insider-articleshow.html
GIST	<p>Russia's president Vladimir Putin is planning to procure the weaponry left behind during the chaotic Afghanistan withdrawal by the US Army, a Kremlin insider said, according to the Taliban based Telegram channel General SVR. Putin has been in process of negotiating with the terror group to procure leftover arms to be used by Russian forces in the ongoing military offensive in Ukraine in exchange for recognising the Taliban government, the source claimed. Those insider sources familiar with the development, and the details of the negotiations between the militant group and the Kremlin, said that the Taliban are extremely "surprised" with such a proposal" and that they have been "discussing the same earnestly."</p> <p><i>"Putin is overseeing negotiations with the Taliban to recognise the Taliban government. In return, the Russian leadership is offering a major arms and military equipment swap," General SVR channel wrote. "Putin reported that the Taliban possess weapons and equipment including those seized after coming to power in Afghanistan, that are scarce for the Russian Army at the front," it further stated.</i></p> <p>As the United States Army had frantically pulled out of Afghanistan, the Taliban militants plundered massive stocks of Western artillery, attack helicopters, and up to 50,000 armoured vehicles. The weaponry was worth half a million, that was seized by the Taliban. Pentagon spent an estimated £62billion on purchasing weapons and equipment to supply to the former Ashraf Ghani administration led Afghan military forces.</p> <p>Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), in a report released earlier last year, revealed that the US backed Afghan commandoes had possessed more than 150 aircraft which may have been captured by the Taliban as they were defeated. US President Joe Biden's National security adviser, Jake Sullivan, had also acknowledged the information at a White House press briefing, saying that government, at the time, did not have "a complete picture, obviously, of where every article of defence materials has gone, but certainly, a fair amount of it has fallen into the hands of the Taliban."</p> <p>US left behind \$7.12 billion worth of military equipment in Afghanistan</p> <p>The US supplied 22,174 Humvees, 33 Black Hawk helicopters, 23 Super Tucano fighter planes, an estimated 115 Maxx Pros trucks, 634 M1117s armoured vehicles, 549,118 machine guns, 16,035 pairs of night vision goggles, 162,043 radios and some 8,000 trucks. assault rifles, pistols, and 4 C-130 transport planes to the Afghan Air Force. A Department of Defense report stated that the United States Army had</p>

left behind an estimated \$7.12 billion worth of military equipment in Afghanistan during the chaotic withdrawal that concluded on August 30, 2021.

Those military equipment was eventually seized by Taliban fighters as the Capital Kabul fell. The US Defense Department had “no plans” to either retrieve the left weaponry from the Taliban “or destroy” the equipment, a wide-ranging congressional mandated DoD report revealed. US military had handed the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) equipment ranging from aircraft, air-to-ground munitions, military vehicles, weapons, and communications equipment amounting to \$18.6 billion between 2005 to August 2021, the DoD report stated.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Public confidence London police crumbles
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/25/uk/uk-metropolitan-police-abuse-intl/
GIST	<p>In a distinguished 30-year career with London’s Metropolitan Police, Dal Babu has seen his fair share of shocking behavior.</p> <p>Yet the handling of a female recruit’s sexual assault allegedly at the hands of her superior disgusted him so much he’s never forgotten the incident.</p> <p>A detective sergeant had taken a young constable to a call, pulled up into a side area and sexually assaulted her, Babu, a former chief superintendent, claimed. “She was brave to report it. I wanted him sacked but he was protected by other officers and given a warning,” he said.</p> <p>Babu said the sergeant in question was allowed to serve until his retirement, while the woman decided to leave the force.</p> <p>The alleged incident happened around a decade ago, Babu said. He resigned in 2013 after being passed over for a promotion.</p> <p>Yet, despite many public moments of apparent reckoning since, the United Kingdom’s biggest police service continues to be rocked by allegations it’s doing little to ensure citizens are safe from some of its own staff.</p> <p>In the latest case, David Carrick, an officer from the same force, pleaded guilty to 49 offenses against 12 women over an 18-year period, including 24 counts of rape.</p> <p>Carrick’s admission, on January 16, came almost two years after the death of Sarah Everard, a young woman who was snatched from a London street by Wayne Couzens, another officer, who like Carrick, served with the country’s elite parliamentary and diplomatic protection unit. This part of the police is armed, unlike many other UK forces.</p> <p>Everard, 33, was raped and murdered before her body was dumped in woodland around 60 miles from London, in the neighboring county of Kent, where Couzens lived. It later emerged that her attacker had a history of sexual misconduct, just like Carrick, who was subject to multiple complaints before and during his 20-year police career – to no avail.</p> <p>Rotten apples</p> <p>Protesters placed 1,071 imitation rotten apples outside Scotland Yard, the Met Police headquarters, on Friday to highlight the same number of officers that have been placed under fresh review in 1,633 cases of sexual assault and violence against women and girls that were made over the past decade.</p> <p>Met Commissioner Mark Rowley apologized for the failings that led to Carrick not being caught earlier, in an interview distributed to UK broadcasters.</p>

Announcing a thorough review of all those employees facing red flags, he said: “I’m sorry and I know we’ve let women down. I think we failed over two decades to be as ruthless as we ought to be in guarding our own integrity.”

On Friday evening, Rowley published a “turnaround plan” for reforming the Metropolitan Police, saying that he was “determined to win back Londoners’ trust.”

Among his desired reforms over the next two years, he said in a statement, was the establishment of an anti-corruption and abuse command, being “relentlessly data driven” in delivery, and creating London’s “largest ever neighborhood police presence.”

Yet Rowley has also bemoaned that he does not have the power to sack dangerous officers, thanks to the fact police can only be dismissed via lengthy special tribunals.

Independent inquiries into the Met’s misconduct system have been scathing. A report last fall found that when a family member or a fellow officer filed a complaint, it took on average 400 days – more than an entire year – for an allegation of misconduct to be resolved.

For Harriet Wistrich, a lawyer lobbying the government to give its existing inquiries into police misconduct statutory powers to better protect women, the issue of domestic abuse as a gateway towards other serious offenses cannot be overlooked.

Wistrich’s Centre for Women’s Justice, a campaign group, first filed a so-called super-complaint in March 2019, highlighting how existing measures designed to protect domestic abuse victims in general were being misused by police, she said, from applications for restraining orders to the use of pre-charge bail.

In the three years thereafter, as successive Covid lockdowns saw victims trapped at home with their abusers and prosecutions for such crimes plummeted, Wistrich says she noticed a trend of police officers’ partners contacting her.

“We had been receiving a number of reports from women who were victims of police officers, usually victims of domestic abuse who didn’t have the confidence to report or if they did report felt that they were massively let down or victimized and sometimes subject to criminal action against them themselves for reporting,” Wistrich told CNN.

“Or (we saw) the police officer using his status within the family courts to undermine her access to her own children,” Wistrich said.

“Certainly if anyone’s a victim of a police officer, they’re going to be extremely fearful of coming forward,” she added.

Carrick’s history appears to confirm Wistrich’s point. He had repeatedly come to the police’s attention for domestic incidents, and would eventually admit behavior so depraved it involved locking a partner in a cupboard under the stairs at his house. When some of his victims tried to seek justice he abused his position to convince them that their word against that of a police officer would never be believed.

Experts say the scale of his offending will further erode trust, particularly among women and as long as the public is unclear about how much risk lies within the ranks of Britain’s 43 police forces, tensions will simmer.

Confidence crumbling

Polling commissioned by a government watchdog, the Independent Office for Police Conduct, in the aftermath of Everard’s murder found fewer than half of UK citizens had a positive attitude towards the police. The head of that same body himself resigned last month amid an investigation into a historical

allegation leveled against him. Other surveys since then have shown confidence has continued to plunge.

Even Wistrich is downbeat on whether or not the police will carry out the reforms that are needed.

“Over the years we’ve had a series of blows to policing, around the policing of violence against women,” she said. “We’ve had the kind of collapse in rape prosecutions which has been an ongoing issue for a while and then we have had the emergence of this phenomenon of police perpetrated abuse.

“But, you know, in a sense it’s amazing how much trust the police have managed to maintain from the general public despite all these stories. So I don’t know how long or how much of a major impact it will have,” she said, referring to Carrick’s recent guilty plea.

For Patsy Stevenson, one run-in with the Met was enough to alter her life’s trajectory in an instant.

After deciding to take part in a vigil attended by thousands to mark Everard’s death in March 2021, she was pinned to the ground and arrested by Met officers when they stormed the event on the grounds that pandemic rules in place at the time made large gatherings a health hazard and illegal.

As a photograph of Stevenson went viral, her flame-red hair tossed about as she was forced to the ground screaming with her hands behind her back, she became both a symbol of militant feminism and the focus of toxic misogyny and death threats.

She failed the physics degree she was studying for and is now raising the hundreds of thousands of pounds she said is needed to sue the police for wrongful arrest and assault.

In response to a question on Stevenson’s lawsuit, the Metropolitan Police told CNN: “We have received notification of a proposed civil claim and shall be making no further comment whilst the claim is ongoing.”

But the fact that the Met Police’s vetting system allowed for men like Carrick and Couzens to remain on the force makes it clear that “the entire system from top to bottom isn’t working,” Stevenson said.

“It feels like we’re all screaming out, can you just change before something like this happens? And now it’s happened again.”

Minorities unsurprised by police impunity

Both Babu, once the Met’s most senior Asian officer, and Stevenson, say the erosion of trust in British policing is not new. Indeed, trust has been declining for years, especially among minority ethnic groups, the LGBTQ+ community and other more vulnerable sections of society, whose treatment at the hands of rogue officers is often underreported in the public domain.

In the days since Carrick last appeared in court, two retired policemen were charged with child sex offenses, and a third serving officer with access to schools was found dead the day that he was due to be charged with child pornography-related offenses.

Four Met officers are facing a gross misconduct investigation after ordering the strip search of a 15-year-old girl in a south London school last year. A safeguarding report found the decision to search the girl was unlawful and likely motivated by racism. The head teacher of the school in question has now resigned.

With the abduction and murder of Everard, a 33-year-old white professional woman, at the hands of an officer abusing his extra powers under Covid restrictions, and the sight of multiple young women, such as Stevenson, later manhandled by the Met under the same rules, fury at this trend of impunity burst forth among a larger swathe of the population.

“This has been happening for years and years with minority groups,” Stevenson told CNN. “And only when someone of a certain color or a certain look was arrested in that manner, like myself, then certain people started to wake up to the idea of oh, hold on, this could happen to us.

“I’ve had death threats since then. Who can I report that to? The police?” she asked.

My own daughters don’t trust the police: ex-police officer

Yet Stevenson said up until her arrest she had always trusted the police.

“I was the type of person to peek out the windows and see if there’s a domestic [incident] going on, let me call the police to sort it out,” she said. “Nowadays, if I was facing some sort of harassment or something in the street, I wouldn’t go to a police officer.”

For Babu’s two adult daughters that’s also the case. Despite growing up with a police officer as a father, he says they have also lost faith in the force.

“We talk about it often and, no, I don’t think they do trust the police,” he told CNN. “And let’s be clear this is also a reflection of a wider issue: the appalling failures in this country to deal with sexual violence perpetrated towards women in general.

“I’m often worried about my daughters’ safety,” he said. “Whenever they go out, even now, I always ask them to text me to tell me they have made it home safely.”

Everard never made it home that night in 2021 as she walked back from a friend’s house in south London, thanks to the criminal actions of a man hired to protect people like her, not prey on them.

Until Britain’s police forces radically tackle the scale of possible injustice occurring on the inside, many women – and others – will rightfully be worried.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Russia military intel operation in Sweden?
SOURCE	https://lansinginstitute.org/2023/01/24/russian-military-intelligence-operation-in-sweden-besides-blocking-the-nations-nato-membership-bid-could-raise-the-level-of-terrorist-threat-in-the-country/
GIST	<p>Russia has masterminded and organized the effort to destabilize Sweden on religious grounds. The operation aims to hamper Sweden’s NATO integration plans, escalate relations with Muslim countries, and create grounds for the acts of terror on the part of Islam followers who arrived in Sweden as refugees.</p> <p>Therefore the Kremlin also attempts to provoke riots and violence with the subsequent higher risk of international terrorist organizations intensifying their operations in Sweden (a secondary goal).</p> <p>On January 21, 2023 leader of the Hard Line partly Rasmus Paludan publically burned the Quran outside Türkiye’s embassy in Stockholm. According to the Swedish TV channel SVT, it was a local journalist, Chang Johannes Frick, who proposed that Paludan burn the Quran. He also guaranteed that any damage that the Hard Line leader may sustain in respect to the stunt will be covered.</p> <p>Russian military intelligence has likely exploited unsuspecting Paludan with the mediation of Chang Johannes Frick, who, according to multiple signs, is a GRU asset recruited for psyops. The location – the area outside Turkey’s embassy in Stockholm – was chosen specifically as the act targeted Ankara. The operation was held ahead of the scheduled visit to Sweden of Turkey’s defense minister. In 2023, the elections will be held in Türkiye, while incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is competing with the Arab world for influence on Muslims worldwide. To Sweden’s move to apply for NATO membership following Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine Türkiye responded with a demand to extradite representatives of Kurdish forces and suspects in the 2016 coup d’état case. At</p>

the same time, **Stockholm's accession aspirations became a matter of concern for Moscow. As a result, the Kremlin plotted an operation aiming to escalate contradictions between Türkiye and Sweden amid the upcoming elections in Ankara, realizing that an attack on a religious symbol of Islam can't be ignored during an ongoing campaign.**

It is not a coincidence that the riots occur against the backdrop of reports that Sweden could join NATO and at a time when Moscow has voiced threats to Stockholm over its chosen course of action. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova has said that, "if Sweden and Finland join NATO, this could lead to "negative implications" for peace in northern Europe.

Chang Johannes Frick (until 1995 – Chang Georg Lindberg) owns a Nyheter idag online newspaper and hosts a show on SD Riks TV channel (which is financed by the Sweden Democrats party). There are numerous signs indicating that the man covertly cooperates with and is affiliated with Russia's GRU military intelligence. This connection raises no doubts as he previously worked for more than a year for Russia's state-owned news agency RT/Russia Today as a "freelancer with regular tasks" for Ruptly, which is RT's subsidiary. Affiliated with the Russian defense ministry and military intelligence, RT took up an active role in the coordinated efforts to compromise the international inquiry into the downing of MH17 in 2014.

RT and Sputnik's Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan also cooperates with the Russian defense ministry and military intelligence. It is important to bear in mind that at the dawn of Simonyan's career in journalism, she was a war correspondent covering the war in Chechnya. This indirectly confirms her ties with the GRU. The defense ministry in 2005 even awarded her a medal. Then, in 2008, she covered the Russian military campaign aimed to seal control of the South Ossetia.

RT actively engaged her in their psyops on foreign soil. In his articles, Frick justified Russia's Crimea grab and war crimes in Syria, as well as praised the Putin regime, while systematically criticizing the US and NATO. **These narratives are fully in line with the content of most GRU psyops run abroad.**

- **Since 2012, he has been a partner of Polina Urvantseva, a Russian national born in Chelyabinsk in July 1989. Handling foreign assets with the help of young Russian women is one of the classic practices preached by Russian intelligence since the Cold War times.**

- In 2017, Chang Frick covered a visit to Russia of a lawmaker with the ultra-right party Sweden Democrats, Pavel Gamov, who has Russian roots. According to [The New York Times](#), in 2018, Russia helped the Sweden Democrats achieve a record-breaking success in parliamentary elections by fueling anti-migrant moods and promoting across social media the websites affiliated with nationalists.

In 2018, Nyheter idag, unlike most Western media platforms, covered Russian elections in a positive light. Today, Frick's outlet focused on circulating anti-Turkish rhetoric across Sweden (Turkey's involvement in the killing of Kurds in Syria, oil deals with the Islamic State, granting asylum to Islamic terrorists, blackmailing Europe with refugees, and Erdogan's involvement in the 2015 refugee crisis), provoking Turkey to stand up against Sweden's appeal to join NATO. **It is highly likely that the content spun by the outlet reflects the tasks set by Moscow depending on the relevant agenda.**

According to our estimates, Russia chose Paludan for the stunt due to the fact that he had already taken part in burning the Quran in Denmark, Germany, and France, as well as demonstrations of the prophet's image, which is severely banned in Islam.

Paludan is a Danish politician, founder of the far-right anti-Islamist political party Stram Kurs ("Hard Line"), which demands a ban on practicing Islam in the country and the deportation from Denmark of all migrants earlier granted asylum. Frick's testimony claiming he stands behind Paludan's stunt indicates attempts to minimize repercussions for Paludan as an act of promised damage compensation for the executioner.

Thus, the scenario was likely chosen of an active measure through an act religious provocation. Earlier, similar measures eventually fueled mass riots and even terrorist acts, as in the case of the Charlie Hebdo HQ in France. Paludan's far-right ideology and anti-migrant policies totally fit the Kremlin in running intelligence operations within the wide framework of the anti-migrant movement across Europe, which Moscow has been generously cultivating since 2015.

Paludan has long gained notoriety for his anti-migrant protests and Quran-burning acts in districts populated by ethnic minorities. The Danish court even found him guilty of racism and slander.

However, the choice of Stockholm and the Turkish embassy goes beyond Paludan's modus operandi in his anti-Islamic efforts. Therefore it is highly likely that his anti-Islamic activity was exploited by third parties to achieve political goals. On January 24, Zvezda, a media outlet run by the Russian defense ministry, posted an article covering Paludan's stunt, putting an emphasis on the worsening of relations between Sweden and Türkiye.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Libraries on frontlines homelessness crisis
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/24/us-libraries-homeless-crisis-social-workers
GIST	<p>Libraries across the US are increasingly on the frontlines of America's homelessness crisis, especially during a winter marked by cold snaps and in the wake of the tailing off of the Covid-19 pandemic which has seen many public institutions reopen.</p> <p>This month two Denver-area libraries closed due to methamphetamine contamination, with library officials from Englewood, Colorado, reporting increased drug use this winter and citing an uptick in homeless people using the library since its pandemic reopening.</p> <p>Homelessness advocates say there is a nationwide trend of homeless people relying on public libraries as a safe haven where they can stay warm, use public restrooms, and avoid harassment from law enforcement. As a result, libraries and library staff are often trapped between a rock and a hard place, said Ryan Dowd, of Homeless Training, a conflict resolution program for frontline workers.</p> <p>While library staff must be committed to serving patrons regardless of socioeconomic status, many of them don't have training on how to deal with an unsheltered person suffering from untreated mental illness, drug addiction, or other problems.</p> <p>Compared to homeless shelters, which are often loud, crowded and struggle to stay clean, "libraries are everything homelessness is not", Dowd explained. "It's a public space, for communal use. If the option is that or be outside all day in 15-degree weather, I know what I'd do.</p> <p>"Homelessness is also incredibly boring," he said.</p> <p>Ty Bellamey, of Black Lives of Humanity Movement, said Volunteers of America help unsheltered people, who often don't have permanent addresses, get a library card. Many of the homeless people she works with are avoiding the police, or other unsheltered people who might steal their stuff, she said. They go to bed, wake up, walk to the library when they're cold, tired and hungry, and then do it again, even if they are handicapped or just got out of jail, she explained.</p> <p>People who have access to shelter beds still will leave to read books and use library computers, Dowd said.</p> <p>In recent years, libraries have also become the frontline for connecting unsheltered people with basic needs.</p> <p>The Las Vegas-Clark county library district provides hygiene kits; almost 30 of the greater Las Vegas area's libraries are designated Safe Place sites for homeless youth. Outreach staff in downtown Chicago</p>

host meetings to connect case managers and unsheltered people, helping the latter to get public benefits and fill out housing applications. A Salt Lake City library offers free clothing and for homeless people, many of whom reside in encampments along a nearby river.

“Many libraries have added social workers to their staff,” said Lessa Kanani’opua Pelayo-Lozada, the American Library Association president, citing a trend that started in the past decade.

Public libraries are “the first point of contact in helping people with serious needs”, she said, which includes referring homeless patrons to other community agencies. Pelayo-Lozada said library services and facilities are for everyone, the housed and unhoused, and staff addresses all patrons needs “without judgment to the best of their ability”.

Despite the inclusivity of a public library’s mission, conflicts between library staff, homeless people and communities have bubbled up this year. Last spring, in Anaheim, California, a homeless man punched a library employee and knocked them unconscious. He was later arrested.

In areas with higher socioeconomic status, the backlash towards the homeless is particularly vocal. This summer, some residents of San Francisco’s Castro district asked for the public library’s wireless internet to be shut off at night, citing the overwhelming number of homeless who camped outside the library.

In November, residents of Downers Grove, a Chicago suburb, raised safety concerns about indecent exposure, drunk and disorderly conduct, and physical assault stemming from the homeless population near the village’s library.

When Dowd trains library staff on de-escalation tactics, he hears a lot of comments like, “They didn’t teach me this stuff in library school,” he said. He says he teaches library staff to focus on the behavior they’re seeing. If someone is unhoused and caused a problem, then they have to deal with it. If a multimillionaire is in the library causing a problem, they also have to deal with it.

Bellamey said she hadn’t heard of any homeless people getting kicked out of the library. The people she works with tell her: “We’re just not allowed to fall asleep. And we’re not allowed to eat food at the tables,” she said.

Dowd stresses the importance of the pre-conflict in working with homeless people, many of whom may be suffering from mental illness or addiction. When a library employee greets and offers help, it generates what he calls sentiment override. People evaluate your actions based on how you acted in the past, he explained, and then when you ask them to do something, they give you the benefit of the doubt that you’re just doing your job.

However, “many people are just so terrified of talking to someone who is homeless so the first time they are talking to someone is when they have a problem,” he said.

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HEADLINE	01/25 NKorea capital lockdown respiratory illness
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/25/north-korea-pyongyang-lockdown-respiratory-illness
GIST	<p>Authorities in the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, have ordered a five-day lockdown due to rising cases of an unspecified respiratory illness, Seoul-based NK News reported on Wednesday, citing a government notice.</p> <p>The notice did not mention Covid-19, but said that residents in the city were required to stay in their homes until the end of Sunday and submit to temperature checks multiple times each day, according to NK News, which monitors North Korea.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the website reported that Pyongyang residents appeared to be stocking up on goods in anticipation of stricter measures. It was unclear if other areas of North Korea had imposed new lockdowns.</p>

	<p>North Korea acknowledged its first Covid-19 outbreak in 2022 but by August had declared victory over the virus.</p> <p>The secretive regime never confirmed how many people caught Covid, apparently because it lacks the means to conduct widespread testing.</p> <p>Instead it reported daily numbers of patients with fever, a tally that rose to 4.77 million out of a population of about 25 million. But it has not reported such cases since 29 July.</p> <p>State media have continued to report on anti-pandemic measures to battle respiratory diseases, including the flu, but had yet to report on the lockdown order.</p> <p>On Tuesday, state news agency KCNA said the city of Kaesong, near the border with South Korea, had intensified public communication campaigns “so that all the working people observe anti-epidemic regulations voluntarily in their work and life”.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 New Zealand's new prime minister sworn in
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/25/chris-hipkins-sworn-in-as-new-zealand-prime-minister-nz-pm
GIST	<p>New Zealand's new prime minister has said responding to cost of living pressures is his government's “absolute priority”, as his swearing-in coincided with the release of stubbornly high inflation figures.</p> <p>“New Zealanders will absolutely see in the coming weeks and months the cost of living is right at the heart of our work program,” Chris Hipkins said, in the first post-cabinet press conference of his tenure. “It is the number one priority that we are facing as a government and they will see tangible evidence of this,” he said.</p> <p>Chris Hipkins was sworn in on Wednesday morning as prime minister by the governor general during a ceremony in the capital, Wellington. “This is the biggest privilege and responsibility of my life,” Hipkins said after formally taking office. “I’m energised and excited by the challenges ahead.”</p> <p>The new prime minister will not have a soft landing in the job. On Wednesday morning, as his first official day in office began, New Zealand's quarterly inflation figures were released, holding steady at the high rate of 7.2%. The main drivers were increases in household costs such as rents and maintenance, higher food prices, and building costs.</p> <p>Hipkins said that while New Zealand's inflation rate was “not unexpected or unusual”, sitting behind the OECD average – but “regardless of where we sit compared to the rest of the world, here in New Zealand household budgets are being stretched and we do need to do as much as we possibly can to help.” In his first meeting with cabinet, Hipkins said he had told ministers to get work under way to reprioritise their policy load to focus on economic challenges.</p> <p>Quizzed by reporters on what specific policies his government would offer to assist New Zealanders struggling with rising costs, he said he was “not gonna start making announcements only a couple of hours into the job”.</p> <p>“We will be making haste. But I’m not going to be so hasty as to make things up on the fly,” he said.</p> <p>While much of his time was devoted to talking about economic pressures, Hipkins said other priorities – including climate change – would not be pushed off the government's work program.</p> <p>“The fact that we’re dealing with a cost of living crisis and ... a whole range of pressures that are immediate doesn’t mean that climate change somehow moves off the agenda,” he said. “It continues to be one of the biggest intergenerational challenges that we face. So you expect to see my government</p>

	<p>continuing to make sure as we owe it to future generations that we do everything we can to tackle that challenge.”</p> <p>Hipkins’ step into the prime ministership came after Jacinda Ardern said last week she no longer had “enough in the tank” after steering the country through natural disasters, its worst-ever terror attack and the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Her Labour government has increasingly struggled in the polls over the past two years, hampered by soaring inflation, a looming recession and a resurgent conservative opposition.</p> <p>She made her last public appearance as prime minister earlier on Wednesday, walking out of parliament as hundreds of onlookers broke into a spontaneous round of applause.</p> <p>Hipkins, the architect of New Zealand’s pandemic response, is now tasked with reviving the government’s sagging popularity ahead of a general election in October.</p> <p>The father-of-two is nicknamed “Chippy” and describes himself as a “regular, ordinary Kiwi” from a working-class background who loves sausage rolls and cycling to work.</p> <p>“Covid-19 and the global pandemic created a health crisis. Now it’s created an economic one and that’s where my government’s focus will be,” Hipkins has said previously.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Job market for remote workers shrinking
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-job-market-for-remote-workers-is-shrinking-11674526943?mod=hp_lead_pos12
GIST	<p>Many prospective workers who were determined to get a remote job just a few months ago are hitting a wall as remote listings rapidly dwindle.</p> <p>After remote work surged during the pandemic, fewer employers now feel the need to lure talent with the promise of working from home. Remote jobs made up 13.2% of postings advertised on LinkedIn last month—down from 20.6% in March. Other job sites such as Indeed.com and ZipRecruiter also report declines in remote listings.</p> <p>Demand for these jobs remains high. Remote jobs attracted a majority, or 52.8%, of all applications submitted on LinkedIn, slightly higher than a year before.</p> <p>The decline in remote listings marks the latest shift in the power dynamic between employers and employees. Companies are showing they can be choosier in their recruiting after months of scrambling for new talent. Hiring and wage growth have slowed from the red-hot pace of much of 2022. And while many laid-off workers in tech and elsewhere are finding employment again, it is taking, on average, longer to secure a new job than it did last spring.</p> <p>This has some workers recalibrating their conditions for considering a new job.</p> <p>Brett Burger, 29 years old, worked from home full-time as a public-relations specialist for Sleep Number Corp. until he was laid off from the Minneapolis-based bed manufacturer this month.</p> <p>Now, he says, he is finding far fewer job postings clearly stating they are remote than when he was job-hunting in 2020. He discovered he was more productive and better able to manage his depression and anxiety while working from home these past couple of years, he says.</p> <p>Though he would take a job that required part-time work in an office, “I would only consider it if it was one to two days max,” he says.</p>

Brenda Arce, a branch director in the Miami office of professional staffing company Robert Half, says the mismatch between available remote jobs and remote job seekers is adding to the difficulty in filling some office-based jobs.

“Candidates still have a lot of options,” she says. So, “if it’s not remote or doesn’t offer any type of flexibility, candidates will not even interview or take it.”

Altogether, fewer people are working remotely than would like to, according to Gallup. In a late 2022 survey of about 8,700 U.S. employees in jobs that could be done remotely, 26% said they worked remotely exclusively, down from 39% in February. A smaller share, 22%, expected to have the option in the future.

Yet a third of all workers told Gallup they would prefer full-time remote work. Companies such [Walt Disney](#) Co. and [Starbucks](#) Corp., meanwhile, are [stepping up the days](#) that hybrid employees are required to come into the office.

[Ally Financial](#) Inc., based in Detroit, stepped up its return-to-office policy in September, shifting from asking workers to come in at least part-time to expecting it. How many days depends on the job and department.

“It was, hey, the expectation is people are coming back to the office, and we want consistency,” says Kathie Patterson, Ally’s chief human resources officer.

While expected office time may limit the pool of candidates applying for some roles, it hasn’t affected retention, she says.

A study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research this week suggests both employers and workers have benefitted from some aspects of remote work. In a survey of full-time employees in 27 countries, workers in the U.S. said they saved an average [55 minutes in commute time](#) on days they worked from home during the pandemic. Worldwide, workers reclaimed a daily average of 72 minutes. About 40% of the saved commute time was plowed into more time on the job, researchers found.

ZipRecruiter chief economist Julia Pollak said the decline in the share of remote job postings reflects, in part, slower hiring in industries where remote work has been most prevalent, such as the tech industry. Nearly 40% of tech-related job postings on LinkedIn this month were for remote positions, though many big tech companies [have conducted layoffs](#) or slowed or frozen hiring.

Yue Xu, who is in her 30s, says she is looking for a remote or hybrid position after being laid off from her software engineer job—a hybrid position—at [Goldman Sachs Group](#) Inc. this month. But the recruiters and human resources officials she has spoken with have said her chances of finding something fully remote are slim. With only a few months left before her H1B visa expires, she may have to compromise, she says.

“I won’t refuse one that requires me to be in five days a week even though it’s not the perfect idea,” she says.

Sam Henry, founder of Seattle Corporate Search, a Seattle-based recruiting firm, said he is advising candidates looking for remote jobs to be flexible since more companies are requiring employees to come in anywhere between two and four days a week. If a job stipulates in-office work most or all of the time, he recommends negotiating for work-from-home days.

“If a company is saying, ‘Hey, we want you in here five days a week,’ just say, ‘OK, well, I’m not asking for more money, but I am asking for Fridays’ ” at home, he says.

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/europes-economy-picks-up-raising-hopes-global-recession-threat-is-receding-11674559234?mod=hp_lista_pos5
GIST	<p>Two of the world's largest economies moved in opposite directions at the start of the year, with U.S. businesses reporting further declines in activity in January while the eurozone saw a modest pickup.</p> <p>The divergence suggests that while the U.S. economy continues to lose momentum, Europe's could be stabilizing, at least for now. The pace of contraction in U.S. firms slowed in January, according to new business surveys released Tuesday, a possible signal that the economy could be bottoming out, thanks to slowing inflation and resilient demand.</p> <p>Combined, the surveys point to a global economy that looks likely to slow this year but could avoid recession. The receding threat of energy shortages in Europe, a still-growing U.S. economy, and China's postpandemic reopening could offset the effect of higher prices and interest rates and keep the world from a steep downturn.</p> <p>In the U.S., the economy continues to expand late last year, despite the Federal Reserve's string of interest-rate increases designed to cool the economy and bring inflation under control. Higher rates have weighed heavily on certain sectors and could be causing households to pull back.</p> <p>Home sales fell almost 18% in 2022 from the previous year. Retail sales were down 1.1% in December and the labor market, while still vibrant, is starting to show cracks. Employers have shed temporary workers for five straight months. Some economists see lower temporary payrolls as a precursor to a broader decline in employment.</p> <p>Yet economists estimate the U.S. economy grew at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 2.8% in the fourth quarter of last year, down slightly from 3.2% in the third quarter. Inflation, which hit a four-decade high last year, is cooling. Consumer prices rose 6.5% in December from a year earlier, down from a 2022 peak of 9.1% in June.</p> <p>The Commerce Department will release fourth-quarter gross-domestic-product data on Thursday. Until recently most economists had seen the eurozone as likely to enter a recession this year after energy bills soared because of the Ukraine war.</p> <p>But the combination of a mild winter, energy-conservation efforts, moves by governments to find new natural-gas suppliers and hundreds of billions of euros in fiscal support appear to have propped up the eurozone economy.</p> <p>On Tuesday, S&P Global said its composite output index for the U.S., a closely watched survey of business activity, was 46.6 in January, a slightly slower pace of contraction from December's index of 45. In Europe, the index rose to 50.2 from 49.3. A reading above 50 points to an expansion while a reading below that level points to a contraction.</p> <p>"A steadying of the eurozone economy at the start of the year adds to evidence that the region might escape recession," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence.</p> <p>The U.S., on the other hand, "has started 2023 on a disappointingly soft note," he said. "Although moderating compared to December, the rate of decline is among the steepest seen since the global financial crisis."</p> <p>Monetary policy could explain some of the divergence and could point to more trouble ahead for Europe, according to Jennifer McKeown, chief global economist at Capital Economics.</p> <p>While the Federal Reserve has raised interest rates by more than 4 percentage points since March to a range of between 4.25% and 4.5%, the European Central Bank has moved at a slower pace, pushing up its policy rate by 2.5 percentage points starting in July.</p>

Rates in Europe have further to rise while the U.S. may be nearing the end of its rate-increase cycle, she wrote in a note to clients Tuesday.

“Some of this pain has yet to come in the eurozone,” she wrote. “However, the region may avoid a recession or, if there is one, it seems likely to be milder than we had feared.”

The surveys of U.S. purchasing managers found that higher interest rates and persistent inflation weighed on demand in the manufacturing and service sectors. But employment continued to rise as companies worked through their backlog of orders.

In Europe, the surveys pointed to a further easing of price pressures in January, as business costs rose at the slowest pace since April 2021. The eurozone’s annual rate of consumer-price inflation eased for the second straight month in December and further declines are expected this year.

By contrast, January’s composite output index for the U.K. fell to 47.8 from 49.0 to reach a two-year low. That was a sign that the country’s economy [may lag behind other parts of Europe](#) as businesses grapple with a shortage of workers, the impact of interest-rate rises by the Bank of England that started at the end of 2021, and the continuing drag on business investment caused by its exit from the European Union.

Elsewhere, China lifted many of its zero-tolerance pandemic controls in early December in an abrupt change of course. While that led to an increase in Covid-19 infections and deaths, it also opened the door to a sharp economic rebound in the world’s second-largest economy, which suffered [its weakest expansion in four decades](#) in 2022.

“The relaxation of China’s strict zero-Covid policy has boosted growth prospects, whilst the warmer weather in Europe has helped temper the intensity of the energy crisis,” economists at Investec wrote in a note to clients as they raised their forecast for global economic growth this year to 2.4% from 2.2%.

But China’s reopening also presents a risk to the global economy. The release of pent-up demand could drive up the price of oil and other commodities, which could put [renewed pressure on global inflation](#). That, in turn, could force central banks to keep interest rates high, which would weigh on growth.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Companies cut temp workers at faster rate
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/companies-cut-temp-workers-in-warning-sign-for-labor-market-11674524006?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Employers are shedding temporary workers at a fast rate, a sign that broader job losses could be on the horizon.</p> <p>In the last five months of 2022, employers cut 110,800 temp workers, including 35,000 in December, the largest monthly drop since early 2021. Many economists view the sector as an early indicator of future labor-market shifts.</p> <p>Temporary employment declined before some recent recessions and during economic slowdowns. Temporary workers, typically employed through staffing agencies, are easy for companies to bring on board—and let go.</p> <p>“For me, it’s a real warning sign,” said James Knightley, chief international economist at ING. “The jobs market may not be invulnerable to the downturn story.”</p> <p>Cutbacks in temporary jobs add to other evidence that companies are adopting more of a cost-cutting stance, Mr. Knightley said. Corporate job-cut announcements are up significantly from a year earlier and business executives are somber about the outlook, he said.</p>

The labor market is historically strong but slowing. Employers [added 223,000 jobs in December](#), the smallest gain in two years. Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal expect higher interest rates to trigger job losses and a recession this year as [the Federal Reserve's interest-rate increases](#) filter through the economy.

Pullbacks in temp employment preceded broader payroll declines by several months in recent downturns, including the 2001 and 2007-09 recessions. For instance, employment in the temp sector began falling in early 2007, while employment across all sectors started to descend about a year later.

Still, trends in the temp sector are volatile and don't necessarily signal a recession is imminent. Temp jobs fell four months in a row in 1995, for instance, during a period of economic growth.

Tom Gimbel, chief executive at staffing firm LaSalle Network, said the easing of temporary employment demand is concentrated among some large companies seeking to trim costs. Those firms are cutting temporary workers hired for special projects, such as beta testing at a tech company, he said.

But many smaller businesses are still looking to scoop up temporary workers, Mr. Gimbel said. Demand remains high for many types of temp help including in software development, healthcare and manufacturing, he said.

"The small- to medium-sized companies are still bringing on people, because they were losing in the war for talent against big companies that had an endless supply of money and budgets to hire people," he said.

The broader decline in temp employment coincides with other indications of a labor-market slowdown. Hiring is cooling. Workers are [taking longer to find jobs](#) and staying on unemployment benefits longer. And workers' average weekly hours are back at prepandemic levels. Manufacturers' overtime hours slipped in December to the lowest level since the pandemic lockdowns and the aftermath of the 2007-09 recession.

Usually companies adjust their payrolls after they experience a decline in demand, said Gad Levanon, chief economist at the Burning Glass Institute.

Weaker demand is emerging in industries related to the manufacturing, transportation and [selling of goods](#). Consumer spending on services, though, is still running strong as sectors including leisure and hospitality continue to recover from the pandemic, he said.

"What we probably will have in the economy in the coming months is continued growth in consumer services and a decline in the rest of the economy," he said. Mr. Levanon expects the economy as a whole will contract by the middle of this year.

Some of the declines in temporary employment could reflect a normalization after aggressive hiring throughout much of 2021 and into 2022. Many businesses—such as [supermarkets and food processors](#)—bulked up with short-term staff to help meet surging demand.

Some in the staffing industry see another explanation for a declining number of temp workers: permanent hiring. The labor market is still historically tight, with unemployment matching a half-century low in December of 3.5%.

Traci Fiette, chief executive of staffing firm [Randstad North America](#), said attrition and turnover remain high, with job seekers confident in their employment opportunities. As a result, companies are trying to hold tight to workers.

"If they find a good temporary employee, for retention purposes, they will take them on as a permanent employee," Ms. Fiette said.

HEADLINE	01/25 Fears over Ethiopia Tigray war peace deal
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/25/ethiopia-tigray-eritrea-peace-deal/
GIST	<p>NAIROBI — A three-month-old peace deal in Ethiopia has revived humanitarian aid and restored telephone links and electricity to the northern region of Tigray, but many families there are still fearful because of the continued presence of soldiers from neighboring Eritrea, blamed for a wave of atrocities during the two-year war.</p> <p>Despite widespread reports of a pullout by the Eritreans, who have supported Ethiopian government forces, residents in three Tigrayan cities said in interviews that they had seen Eritrean soldiers as recently as Tuesday. Others said family members in rural areas had informed them that soldiers there also had not left.</p> <p>“We are not at peace when we live in fear,” said one resident, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.</p> <p>This weekend, an ostentatious convoy of hundreds of vehicles carrying Eritrean soldiers drove north through Tigray, raising hopes among some residents that the soldiers were finally withdrawing. Soldiers blared horns and waved Eritrean flags, according to a video shared with The Washington Post, and taunting messages were inscribed on the sides of the trucks. “We are savage to our enemies,” read one.</p> <p>It remains unclear whether the Eritrean soldiers were pulling out or just repositioning. The governments of Ethiopian and Eritrea have not issued public statements, and access of journalists to the region remains severely restricted, making it difficult to determine the status of the Eritreans, who entered the war in its early days to support embattled Ethiopian troops who had been overwhelmed by the seizure of their bases by Tigrayan rebel forces.</p> <p>Tigrayan forces and Ethiopia’s central government signed a peace deal Nov. 2 in South Africa, ending a conflict that displaced more than 2 million people, cost hundreds of thousands of lives and threatened the integrity of Africa’s second-most-populous nation. The cessation in fighting has improved the lives of millions, clearing the way for thousands of trucks carrying food and other aid to reach the starving region.</p> <p>But the deal skirted the thorniest issues and did not involve — or even mention — Eritrea, whose soldiers rapidly gained a reputation for brutality. Tigrayan residents accused them of systematic gang rapes, sexual slavery, industrial-scale looting and frequent mass killings of civilians — allegations supported by independent human rights groups and journalists’ investigations.</p> <p>Eritrean Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel did not respond to requests for comment on how many Eritrean soldiers were present in Tigray and how long they would remain, or address reports of atrocities. Ethiopia’s national security adviser, Redwan Hussein, and the prime minister’s spokeswoman, Billene Seyoum, also did not respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>Tigrayan residents, stung by multiple reports of an Eritrean withdrawal over the past month, provided The Post with photographs and videos taken in their cities over the past two weeks showing Eritrean soldiers in their camouflage uniforms and trademark plastic sandals. The pictures and videos, verified by The Post, show Eritrean soldiers strolling through the town of Axum in northern Tigray. Witnesses also spoke of Eritrean soldiers near Adigrat and in other towns.</p> <p>On Tuesday, residents in the towns of Axum, Adwa and Sheraro said some Eritrean soldiers were still present.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeted on Saturday that he had spoken to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and that “the ongoing withdrawal of Eritrean troops is a critical step in securing hope and peace.”</p> <p>Ethiopia desperately needs funds to rebuild its economy. It has a \$907 million financing pact with the World Bank but is also seeking debt restructuring and wants its suspension from a preferential U.S. trade</p>

deal to be lifted. “To have international funding and financing flow, Eritrea must withdraw,” a diplomat said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

In the Tigray region, doctors at hospitals in three cities said last week that women were still coming in and reporting that they had been raped by Eritrean soldiers. Residents said in interviews that the Eritreans were also routinely looting food, animals and any remaining phones or equipment from the impoverished population.

In Adwa, two residents said Eritrean soldiers rounded up a group of young men from the marketplace in mid-January. They have not been seen since. The residents said relatives were appealing to the Ethiopian military for news. Col. Getnet Adane, an Ethiopian military spokesman, did not respond to a request for comment.

When the conflict first erupted, Eritrea and Ethiopia both spent months denying the presence of Eritrean troops in Tigray. The intervention eventually became obvious, but the number of soldiers sent to Ethiopia has never been disclosed.

In Eritrea, residents there reported unprecedented levels of forced military conscription last year. In November, one resident of the capital, Asmara, reported counting more than a dozen homes on five streets that had been sealed by the government. Household evictions have become a common punishment if a family member runs away from mandatory military service or if a family refuses to inform on relatives who had done so.

Still, the peace agreement between the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan rebels has already brought relief to doctors who had watched patients die for lack of basic medicine in the months when aid was blocked, and to the families of combatants and civilians who survived.

The Tigrayan forces handed over an estimated two-thirds of their heavy weapons to the government this month, the diplomat said. In addition to the resumption of humanitarian aid, life has improved as electricity has been restored to the main towns, and two local banks are permitting small cash withdrawals for the first time since November 2020. Phone connections have been restored in the main towns.

Flights between Mekelle in Tigray and the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa have also resumed, although passengers say there have been restrictions over who is allowed to board.

One woman waiting at the airport for two days said she witnessed four families exuberantly reunite, only for the returning member to suddenly collapse as they realized someone was missing or noticed the traditional gauzy Ethiopian white shawl, the netela, was being worn in the mourning fashion. Families traditionally do not like to break news of a death over the phone, preferring to put it off until it can be told in person.

When relatives are farther away, the news can take even longer to filter through. A health professional living abroad said he had spoken to his family on the phone three times since the peace deal.

Each time, he asked to speak to his father, who was a priest and farmer, and was told he was at church. In fact, his father had died in November, after being ill for two weeks, when local hospitals had no medicine to treat him.

Finally, his family managed to contact other Ethiopian expatriates in the city he lived in. Two went to knock on his door. When he opened it and saw their formal attire, he knew his father was dead.

“I just wanted to hold his hands and show my love to him. That’s what hurts my heart,” he said. “I did not put any soil on his coffin.”

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SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2023/01/24/tornado-threat-gulf-coast/
GIST	<p>Search and rescue efforts were underway in the Houston area after a destructive tornado downed power lines, overturned trucks and flooded streets Tuesday afternoon.</p> <p>The National Weather Service’s Houston/Galveston office has received no reports of deaths or injuries, NWS meteorologist Tim Cady said early Tuesday evening, though the storm continues to march east along the Gulf Coast.</p> <p>Cady said there are reports of “very widespread structural damage” in Deer Park and Pasadena, southeastern suburbs of Houston.</p> <p>Deer Park Mayor Jerry Mouton Jr. said during a news conference that about 30 roads in the city were closed and that the Deer Park Independent School District would close Wednesday. He added that several school buildings were damaged.</p> <p>Mouton said the tornado also hit the San Jacinto Manor assisted-living facility — initially reported as a structure collapse — but none of the 62 patients were injured. He said three patients were hospitalized as a precaution and four were picked up by families, while the remaining patients were split between four facilities.</p> <p>Cady, the meteorologist, said Pasadena and Deer Park are home to houses and petrochemical plants alike. He said they haven’t received any reports regarding the petrochemical plants.</p> <p>Cady said he and his staff will evaluate the storm’s strength Wednesday but noted that this is the office’s first time issuing a tornado emergency, which is the service’s most dire alert.</p> <p>“We’ve done plenty of flash flood emergencies, but this is our first tornado emergency,” he said.</p> <p>The area went into a tornado watch at 10:50 a.m. local time, Cady said. The first official tornado warning was issued at 2:10 p.m. and the emergency was issued for southeastern Harris County at 2:24 p.m., once they “were very, very confident that there was a large and destructive tornado.”</p> <p>The threat is over in Houston but not for its Gulf Coast neighbors.</p> <p>Cady said the storm is set to track through Louisiana through the evening, then across Mississippi and Alabama before arriving at the eastward tip of the Florida panhandle about midnight.</p> <p>He said the storm is “absolutely still a threat” for those south of Interstate 10.</p> <p>The NWS office in Lake Charles, La., received a report from a police officer that a twister had crossed Highway 171 just south of a rural area called Ragley, said meteorologist Stacey Denson.</p> <p>She said her office has received no reports of injury or worse, adding that the storm will have moved through her area near the Texas-Louisiana border about 10 p.m. local time.</p> <p>“It’s still too early to confirm anything else,” she said.</p> <p>More than a dozen tornado warnings has been issued as storms tore through the Gulf Coast of Texas, the latest activity in what has already been a blockbuster January for severe weather across the Deep South. An expansive stretch of the Gulf Coast was bracing for severe thunderstorms and possible tornadoes Tuesday.</p> <p>The National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center has drawn a Level 3 out of 5 “enhanced” risk of severe weather on its outlook maps, signifying the potential for a disruptive and dangerous event. The center is warning of a forthcoming squall line with embedded tornadoes and pockets of straight-line wind damage. The threat along the Interstate 10 corridor could persist deep into the night.</p>

Several large population centers, including Houston; Galveston, Tex.; New Orleans; Gulfport, Miss.; Biloxi, Miss.; and Mobile, Ala., are in the heart of the severe weather risk. Additional severe thunderstorms are probable over the Southeast on Wednesday.

The Storm Prediction Center issued a tornado watch until 6 p.m. Central time for the zone from roughly Corpus Christi, Tex., to Lake Charles, La., cautioning that a couple of “intense tornadoes” are possible. Additional tornado watches may be issued for areas to the east.

The month to date has already featured nearly 140 reports of tornadoes. Some may be duplicates, but regardless, twisters have been swarming the South at breakneck pace. An average January features 36 tornadoes across the Lower 48.

Areas affected

The main severe-weather risk area extends from the Matagorda Peninsula in Texas to southern Alabama and the Florida Panhandle. Western zones will see the threat begin and end earlier, with the storms progressing farther east during the late evening into the overnight.

A **Level 3 out of 5 enhanced risk** covers the immediate coastline (where instability, or thunderstorm fuel, will be the greatest). That includes New Orleans; Baton Rouge; Mobile, Ala.; Galveston, Tex.; Pasadena, Tex.; and Metairie, La. Much of Interstate 10 weaves through this zone as well, making the hazardous weather a factor that motorists will need to contend with and be prepared for.

A **Level 2 out of 5 risk** zone borders the enhanced region; it covers Houston and Sugar Land, Tex., as well as parts of the Golden Triangle, including Beaumont, Tex., and Lake Charles, La. Farther northwest, a **Level 1 out of 5 risk** splits the difference between greater severe weather odds and general thunderstorms. Corpus Christi, Tex.; Montgomery and Tuscaloosa Ala., including much of the Interstate 59/20 corridor; and Jackson, Miss., are within the marginal zone.

Hazards

Tornado risk: There will be two “modes” of tornado risk. A quasi-linear convective system (QLCS), or squall line with embedded kinks of rotation, will form during the afternoon or evening hours. That QLCS will probably produce damaging straight-line winds by mixing jet stream momentum to ground level. It could also contain some quick-hitting and fast-moving tornadoes.

Ahead of the mainline, a few isolated rotating or “supercell” thunderstorms may form. Assuming they don’t suffer interference from other storms, any supercells would be able to tap into the atmosphere’s full hostility and produce an isolated significant tornado.

Damaging straight-line winds: Any lines of thunderstorms that develop would probably produce winds in the 50 to 65 mph range.

Hail: Because thunderstorms won’t be particularly tall (not reaching high into the atmosphere where it’s coldest), hail probably won’t be a primary concern. That said, a few instances of quarter- to half-dollar-sized hail can be expected.

Heavy rainfall: An inch or two of rainfall is expected with storms along the Gulf Coast, though East Texas and western Louisiana could see 2 to 3 inches where downpours “train,” or move repeatedly over the same areas. That would run the risk of localized urban and poor drainage flooding.

Confidence

This is an unusually low-confidence forecast. Meteorologists largely struggle forecasting the impacts of HSLC, or “High Shear/Low CAPE” setups — in other words, environments characterized by an abundance of spin, but minimal instability or energy supplied by humidity and warmth to fuel thunderstorms.

We know that any cloud that grows high enough into the atmosphere will probably rotate. That's because of the abundance of shear, or a change of wind speed and/or direction with height. But how tall will thunderclouds blossom? That hinges on the availability of instability, which is in question.

The greatest propensity for severe weather will be along the immediate Gulf of Mexico coastline, where ocean-heated moisture-rich air will waft northward. Risk will drop off appreciably once one heads more than a few counties inland.

The meteorological setup

At present, a low-pressure system is swirling through west Texas near the Big Bend, heading for the Permian Basin; it's spreading snow from northern Texas into Oklahoma and northwest Arkansas.

Southerly winds on the eastern side of the low pressure zone are drawing moisture and warmth northward, much of which is riding up and over a lip of cold, dense air hugging the ground:

That's already creating "elevated" thunderstorms, or storms rooted in warm air at the mid-levels, atop the wedge of cold. Those thunderstorms were spreading over much of Central Texas late Tuesday morning but won't pose a tornado risk. Some may produce gusty winds and hail though.

The warm front setting of these storms was lifting north, and it's likely that "surface-based" thunderstorms will blossom by early Tuesday afternoon in the "warm sector" as air in the 60s and 70s comes ashore and claims more territory.

Weather models depict thunderstorms blossoming in that warm, moist region near the coast around midday. They'll move into the Houston-Galveston area shortly thereafter, with a robust tornado threat by midafternoon.

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HEADLINE	01/25 China faces natural gas shortages in winter
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/business/china-natural-gas-shortages.html
GIST	<p>For many people across China, a shortage of natural gas and alarmingly cold temperatures are making a difficult winter unbearable. For Li Yongqiang, they mean freezing nights without heat.</p> <p>"We dare not turn on the heat overnight — after using it for five or six hours, the gas stops again," Mr. Li, a 45-year-old grocer, said by telephone from his home in northern China's Hebei Province. "The gas shortage is really affecting our lives."</p> <p>The lack of natural gas, which is used widely across China to heat homes and businesses, has angered tens of millions of people and spilled over into caustic complaints on social media.</p> <p>One person in Hebei Province wrote of waking early four nights a week because she was too cold to sleep despite two comforters on her bed. A viral video on China's internet shows a high-rise apartment building in a different northern province, Shanxi, with the windows plastered with bright red posters of the sort often seen at Lunar New Year — except that these posters say "cold."</p> <p>Already this winter, hundreds of millions of people have caught Covid since Xi Jinping, China's top leader, abandoned his "zero Covid" policy in early December. That policy had kept infections low but required costly precautions like mass testing — measures that exhausted the budgets of local governments. Many towns and cities now lack the money they need even to pay their own employees, much less to maintain adequate supplies of gas for homes.</p> <p>The crunch, experts said, has exposed systemic weaknesses in China's energy regulations and infrastructure, while showing the reach of the global market turmoil provoked last year by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p>

Russia has long been a major supplier of natural gas to China and many regions, particularly Europe. When Russia halted exports to Europe last summer, nations bid up world prices as they stockpiled supplies from elsewhere. A surprisingly warm winter has since helped push gas prices lower in Europe, but the bitter cold is now pushing them even higher in China.

At the same time, China's provincial and municipal governments have reduced customary subsidies for natural gas consumption that used to keep a lid on heating bills. The national government has responded by telling local governments to provide heat, without giving them money to pay for it. As a result, gas is effectively being rationed, with households receiving the minimum needed for cooking food but very little for heat.

"It's a perfect winter storm for Xi," said Willy Lam, a longtime analyst of Chinese politics who is a senior fellow at the Jamestown Foundation. "Nothing seems to be working, partly because nobody seems to have much cash."

This is the third grass-roots energy crisis in just five years for Mr. Xi. His government abruptly banned coal-fired boilers across large areas of northern China in 2017 in favor of gas ones. It was a quick fix for air pollution, but residents soon found there was not enough gas for all the new boilers.

Then in 2021, the price of coal jumped higher than the regulated price at which utilities could sell electricity generated from coal. Reluctant to lose money, utilities temporarily closed power plants, contributing to a wave of blackouts.

Many in Europe worried last year how they would heat their homes this winter after President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia reduced and then halted natural gas shipments to the continent.

But Europe has not just had an unusually warm winter. Gas companies there have raised prices, encouraging conservation, and governments have subsidized consumers to offset at least part of the extra cost. European companies also accumulated large stockpiles of extra gas last autumn. Worries have faded that families in Europe will not have enough natural gas to heat their homes this winter.

In China, the temperature has become unusually frigid. Over the weekend, numerous weather stations in northernmost China's Heilongjiang Province reached the lowest temperatures they had ever recorded. Mohe City, the northernmost city in China, reached lows for three straight days below minus 50 degrees Celsius. China's meteorology agency has issued nationwide warnings this week of very cold weather.

The government has taken notice of the gas shortages.

"Some localities and enterprises have not implemented measures to ensure the supply and price of energy for people's livelihood," Lian Weiliang, vice chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic planning agency, said at a news conference on Jan. 13.

He added that the national government would hold local officials responsible for supplying homes, but did not indicate that Beijing would provide any money to help them do so. China will also build more natural gas storage sites, he said, to try to avoid similar problems in the future.

China actually has enough natural gas to make it through the winter, said Yan Qin, a China energy specialist at Refinitiv, a data company in London. The problem is that pricing regulations and declining subsidies are preventing gas from reaching households in northern China when temperatures plunge.

Much of the world has shunned Russian energy during the war, but China has stepped up its purchases of natural gas from Russia. Imports from Russia of liquefied natural gas, which can be transported by ship, jumped 42.3 percent last year, as Chinese companies bought cargos that businesses in Japan and elsewhere were no longer willing to buy because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Much of that Russian gas was imported at very high prices. But Chinese regulations strictly limit the price at which municipal and township gas distributors are allowed to sell gas to households. This winter, the wholesale cost of gas is up to three times the price that distributors are allowed to charge residential customers, said Jenny Zhang, a natural gas expert at the Lantau Group, an energy and power consulting firm in Hong Kong that specializes in mainland China.

Distributors are allowed to pass along extra costs to industrial and business users of gas, but not to individuals. So when prices rise, the companies have a big incentive to cut off homes and sell mostly to industrial and commercial users.

The problem is particularly acute in populous Hebei Province near Beijing. Many local gas companies have been at least partly privatized in recent years.

“They don’t have deep pockets when the gas price is swinging,” Ms. Zhang said.

And local governments in places like Hebei are under severe financial strain.

Their main source of revenue, sales of land leases to developers, dried up last year as the pandemic costs skyrocketed. The acreage leased to developers plummeted 53 percent last year as the real estate sector ran into financial difficulties.

Hebei Province, which wraps around three sides of Beijing and has 74.5 million people, has fared worst of all. The national government has been particularly insistent over the past five years that Hebei homes and businesses switch to gas because air pollution from their use of coal quickly wafts into Beijing. Many residents, including Mr. Li, the grocer, no longer have coal or coal-burning stoves.

Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital, was then among the first cities to run low on money for Covid testing last autumn. It moved quickly to abandon testing late last year as soon as Beijing began signaling flexibility on the “zero Covid” policy, only to end up with an immediate wave of cases. Now temperatures in the mountainous province are falling far below freezing.

With revenue dwindling and costs rising, local governments in Hebei have little financial muscle to resume subsidizing gas quickly for their customers.

“If they would be able to subsidize,” Ms. Qin, the China energy specialist, said, “we would not have this shortage.”

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HEADLINE	01/24 Cemetery for Russia mercenaries expands
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/24/world/europe/wagner-group-cemetery-russia-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>A cemetery used by the notorious Russian mercenary group Wagner has grown rapidly in size over the past several months, according to interviews and an analysis by The New York Times of satellite imagery and video footage. The expanded burial ground is rare visual evidence that shows the toll the invasion of Ukraine is taking on Wagner, especially its rank-and-file soldiers.</p> <p>The expansion coincides with a bloody offensive by Russian soldiers and mercenaries to gain ground in eastern Ukraine. The U.S. government says that Wagner’s battlefield casualties are in the thousands and that 90 percent of them are inmates who were recruited to fight in exchange for being released from prison, assuming they survived.</p> <p>A satellite image captured on Jan. 24 shows about 170 burial plots in an area of the cemetery known to hold Wagner fighters, a number that has increased to nearly seven times that seen on satellite imagery just two months ago.</p>

Wagner's cemetery is a recent addition to its growing infrastructure inside Russia, where it seeks to position itself as a superior fighting force over the Russian military. The graves' existence, near the group's primary training facility in the southeastern village of Molkin, was first made public in December by Vitaly Wotanovsky, an activist and a former Russian Air Force officer.

Mr. Wotanovsky, 51, told The Times that he visits graveyards to document cases of Russians who have been killed while fighting in Ukraine. The cemetery's location might have remained unknown had local residents not tipped him off that the area was being used to bury the unclaimed bodies of Wagner fighters.

Over the course of several visits, he photographed a growing number of grave markers and uploaded them to his Telegram channel, [Titushki in Krasnodar](#).

"Our goal is to show people that war results in deaths, and it's not somewhere far away or on TV, but it's here next to us," Mr. Wotanovsky said.

There may be even more dead than what is easily visible. He noted that locals had told him many fighters had most likely been cremated.

For years, Wagner's mercenaries have kept a low profile while operating abroad in countries like Syria, Libya and the Central African Republic. The United Nations and human rights groups accuse the group of targeting civilians and conducting mass executions.

But since the start of the war in Ukraine, the group has expanded its public presence with promotional videos and claims of its own fighting prowess — much of this led by the group's public face, Yevgeny Prigozhin.

[In a video that emerged last September](#), Mr. Prigozhin hinted at the cemetery's existence while recruiting inmates from Russia's penitentiary system, promising to take care of their remains if they died in combat.

"For those who do not know where they want to be buried, we bury them near the chapel of PMC Wagner," he said.

Ten days after Mr. Wotanovsky revealed the cemetery's location, several videos were published by pro-Kremlin media outlets showing Mr. Prigozhin laying flowers at a grave in the cemetery. Also visible are rows of freshly dug graves, each adorned with wreaths in the shape and colors of Wagner's logo.

"He works a lot on heroifying — it's now a sort of Russian policy: why hold onto this life, when you can die so heroically," said Olga Romanova, the founder of Russia Behind Bars, a charity organization that assists convicts and their families. "Death is not horrific. What's horrific is the opposite: not to die for the Motherland."

That footage, and Mr. Wotanovsky's photos, also offers clues about who has been fighting, and dying, for Wagner in recent months. At least 16 of the names and birth dates seen on grave markers appeared in online databases of people convicted of crimes in Russia. Many probably died in [fighting](#) around the Ukrainian towns of Bakhmut and Soledar, where the mercenaries and the Russian military have sustained heavy losses over the past four months.

In another video, Mr. Prigozhin visited Wagner's chapel, about eight miles from the cemetery. The footage showed the mercenary company emulating the ways in which a country's official military might memorialize its own war dead, with grand monuments and murals on well-manicured grounds.

Also present are rows of black walls containing compartments typical of how cremated remains are interred. Each compartment has an identification number and a display of the deceased's combat awards.

The Times identified 21 walls in total at the chapel, each containing 42 compartments, suggesting that hundreds of deceased Wagner fighters are either interred or, at the very least, memorialized at the chapel.

	<p>It is unclear if all of these fighters were killed in Ukraine, or elsewhere, but the footage still offers a rare look at the scale of Wagner's losses.</p> <p>On Friday, the White House said it would designate Wagner a transnational criminal organization. Wagner is already under U.S. sanctions, but this new measure would, in part, bar Americans from providing money, goods or services to the company.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 US to boost artillery ammunition production
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/24/us/politics/pentagon-ukraine-ammunition.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is racing to boost its production of artillery shells by 500 percent within two years, pushing conventional ammunition production to levels not seen since the Korean War as it invests billions of dollars to make up for shortfalls caused by the war in Ukraine and to build up stockpiles for future conflicts.</p> <p>The effort, which will involve expanding factories and bringing in new producers, is part of “the most aggressive modernization effort in nearly 40 years” for the U.S. defense industrial base, according to an Army report.</p> <p>The new investment in artillery production is in part a concession to reality: While the Pentagon has focused on fighting wars with small numbers of more expensive precision-guided weapons, Ukraine is largely relying on howitzers firing unguided shells.</p> <p>Before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, the U.S. Army's production of 14,400 unguided shells a month had been sufficient for the American military's way of war. But the need to supply Kyiv's armed forces prompted Pentagon leaders to triple production goals in September, and then double them again in January so that they could eventually make 90,000 or more shells a month.</p> <p>Unguided artillery shells have become the cornerstone of the 11-month-old conflict, with both Ukrainian and Russian troops firing thousands of howitzer rounds at each other every day, along a front line more than 600 miles long. These weapons are most likely responsible for the greatest percentage of war casualties, which U.S. officials have estimated at more than 100,000 on each side.</p> <p>The Army's decision to expand its artillery production is the clearest sign yet that the United States plans to back Ukraine no matter how long the war continues.</p> <p>The ammunition the United States has sent to Ukraine includes not just the 155-millimeter shells for howitzers, but also guided rockets for HIMARS launchers, thousands of antiaircraft and anti-tank missiles and more than 100 million rounds for small arms.</p> <p>The howitzer shells currently in production — essentially large steel bullets filled with explosives — cannot be made as quickly as many consumer goods. Although the way they are built is slowly changing with increasing automation and newer technologies, the heart of the process — cutting, heating, forging and bending steel into shape — remains largely unchanged.</p> <p>The Defense Department will fund new facilities to make artillery ammunition and is spending roughly \$1 billion a year over the next 15 years to modernize government-owned ordnance production facilities in an effort to increase automation, improve worker safety and ultimately make munitions more quickly. Just since August, Congress has allocated \$1.9 billion to the Army for the effort.</p> <p>“We are really working closely with industry to both increase their capacity and also the speed at which they're able to produce,” Christine Wormuth, the secretary of the Army, said last month, adding that this includes identifying “particular components that are sort of choke points” and “sourcing those to try to be able to move things more quickly.”</p>

[Douglas R. Bush](#), an assistant secretary of the Army who is the service's top acquisition official, said the United States is one of just a handful of countries that maintains significant reserves of such weapons in times of war and peace alike.

"In previous conflicts, we had stockpiles that were sufficient for the conflict," Mr. Bush said in an interview. "In this case, we're seeking to increase production to both maintain our stockpile for some other contingency but also supply an ally."

"So it's a bit of a new situation," he added.

The unguided shells currently in production are just under three feet long, weigh roughly 100 pounds and are filled with 24 pounds of explosives — enough to kill people within 150 feet of impact and injure exposed soldiers more than 400 feet away.

So far the United States has sent more than one million of the explosive projectiles to Ukraine, while other NATO countries and major non-NATO allies of the United States have also contributed shells, largely without disclosing how many.

The Pentagon has declined to comment on the size of its reserves of 155-millimeter shells, but Mr. Bush said the planned increases in production would support Ukraine's needs in real time and replenish the amount drawn down from existing stocks.

"We're going to start seeing this summer our first significant step up in terms of rounds per month," he said of the shell production goals. "The ramp really hits its stride in fiscal year 2024."

While the new investment in the nation's ammunition plants will offer a significant boost in production, it is still just a fraction of the manufacturing capacity that the military mustered in the 1940s.

By the end of World War II, the United States had about 85 ammunition plants, according to a [congressional report from late last year](#). Today, the Pentagon relies on [six government-owned, contractor-operated Army ammunition plants](#) to do most of this work.

The military's ammunition infrastructure "is comprised of installations with an average age of more than 80 years," and much of it still operates in "World War II-era buildings, and in some cases, with equipment from the same period," according to the Army's report on modernizing those facilities, which was drafted in 2021.

Representative Rob Wittman, Republican of Virginia and a member of the House Armed Services Committee, said the invasion of Ukraine was a "Sputnik" moment — referring to the 1957 Soviet launch of the first satellite into space — that made clear the need for this rapid expansion in ammunition manufacturing capacity in the United States.

"The Russian invasion of Ukraine has really exposed how brittle and fragile our supply chain is, particularly as it relates to munitions, which is now clearly kind of an emergency in terms of trying to replenish," Mr. Wittman said this month, during remarks before a group of top Pentagon officials.

The production of artillery ammunition in the United States is a complicated process that primarily takes place in four government-owned facilities run by private defense contractors. The empty steel bodies are forged in [factories in Pennsylvania](#) run by General Dynamics, the explosives for those shells are mixed together by BAE Systems workers [in Tennessee](#) and then poured into the shells at a plant run by American Ordnance [in rural Iowa](#), while the propellant charges to shoot them out of howitzer barrels are made by BAE [in southwest Virginia](#).

The fuzes screwed into the nose of these shells, which are required to make the projectiles explode, are produced by contractors in other locations.

In November, the Army announced a [\\$391 million contract](#) with the Ontario-based company IMT Defense to make shell bodies and issued an order to General Dynamics to build a new production line for 155-millimeter shells at a factory in Garland, Texas.

A fourth domestic producer of 155-millimeter shell bodies will probably be announced soon, Mr. Bush said.

All of this increased production is likely to be used as quickly as it can be [shipped to Ukraine's border by U.S. Transportation Command](#).

The Ukrainians have been firing so many artillery barrages that about a third of the 155-millimeter howitzers provided by the United States and other Western nations [are out of commission for repairs](#).

The Pentagon has also bought ammunition for the Soviet-era weapons that Ukraine had before the invasion and that still make up a large part of its arsenal: 100,000 rounds of ammunition for Russian-made tanks, 65,000 rounds of artillery ammunition and 50,000 Grad [artillery rockets](#).

Those munitions are still being produced in limited numbers in some of the former satellite nations of the Soviet Union in Central and Eastern Europe.

"We're not talking numbers that would dramatically move the dial," Mr. Bush said. "Those kinds of options have been and are being evaluated."

"The priority has been on providing NATO's standard ammunition," he said. "A lot of it, though, depends on what Ukraine wants."

As the war dragged on, Russian forces found that they could not sustain the high levels of artillery fire they used to overmatch Ukrainian gun crews over the summer. By September, according to U.S. intelligence services, [Russia was seeking to purchase artillery shells from North Korea](#), which still uses Soviet-caliber weapons. The next month, Ukrainian troops near the city of Kherson said Russia's rate of fire had fallen to [roughly the same as theirs](#).

In December, a U.S. defense intelligence analyst who was not authorized to speak publicly said reports from Russia indicated that the government in Moscow [had ordered employees at munition plants to work additional hours](#) in an effort to produce more ordnance for Russian forces to use in Ukraine, including artillery ammunition.

The experience in Ukraine has broadly reminded the Pentagon and military contractors that the United States needs to focus more on both basic artillery and missiles — not just the expensive equipment needed to fire these weapons.

Most militaries are focused on buying just enough weapons for short-term conflicts, Gregory Hayes, the chief executive of Raytheon Technologies, said last month at a conference in California with Pentagon leaders, referring to the stealthy F-35 fighters that his company helps build and that have been sold to the United States and many of its allies. "I think, if anything, what the Ukraine situation has taught us is that we need depth in our supply chain, depth in our war reserves, much more than we had ever expected."

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HEADLINE	01/24 Cost of postage stamp goes up again
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/24/us/usps-forever-stamps-prices.html
GIST	<p>It just got a little more expensive to mail letters in the United States and abroad.</p> <p>The price for first-class Forever stamps increased to 63 cents from 60 cents this week, a 5 percent price jump that stemmed from rising operating expenses and losses for the Postal Service.</p>

The change, which went into effect on Sunday, was first announced in October. The new rates also include increases in the prices of one-ounce metered mail, to 60 cents from 57 cents, and domestic postcards, to 48 cents from 44 cents. Sending a one-ounce letter overseas is now \$1.45, up from \$1.40.

“As operating expenses continue to rise, these price adjustments provide the Postal Service with much needed revenue to achieve the financial stability sought by its [Delivering for America](#) 10-year plan,” the Postal Service said, referring to its plan to become “self-sustaining and high performing.” The agency said in 2021 that it projected \$160 billion in losses over the next 10 years that it hoped to mitigate.

[The last price increase was in July](#), when the price of a first-class stamp for a one-ounce letter rose to 60 cents from 58 cents. Before [the increase to 58 cents in 2021](#), the stamps cost 55 cents.

Officials have said that customers can expect price increases twice a year at least through 2024.

“The Postal Service expects that, in each subsequent year, it will implement price changes for all Market Dominant classes in January and July of such year,” the Postal Regulatory Commission said in a report about rate schedules. It was not clear how much they would go up each year.

The Postal Service said it generally did not receive tax funding and instead “relies on the sale of postage, products and services to fund its operations.”

When it was introduced in 2007, the Forever Stamp cost 41 cents. The stamp launched with an image of the Liberty Bell. Since 2011, all first-class stamps have been Forever stamps. The stamps remain valid regardless of price increases.

Despite the convenience and popularity of electronic communications and digital media, people still mail letters. The Postal Service said it delivered 13.9 billion pieces of first-class mail (letters, cards and bill payments) in 2021, down from 23.2 billion in 2012.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Concern: China growing push in Antarctica
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/24/polar-opposite-chinas-growing-push-antarctica-spar/
GIST	<p>It has threatened Taiwan, challenged its neighbors in the South China Sea, clashed with India high in the Himalayas and sought to disrupt the U.S.-led international order everywhere from sub-Saharan Africa and South America to outer space and cyberspace. Now China is opening another front in its quest to become a global superpower: the South Pole.</p> <p>Beijing has used its economic clout and growing military strength to assert a role as a “near-Arctic” state to seek a security and economic role as a warming globe makes Arctic resources and trade routes more accessible.</p> <p>On the other side of the world, China is expanding its footprint in Antarctica to become a “polar great power” by the end of the decade.</p> <p>“China has an interest in being seen as an important player in all kinds of regions,” said Jacob Stokes, a senior fellow with the Indo-Pacific Security Program at the Washington-based Center for a New American Security. “Its ability to operate in [the polar regions] is ‘world-class’ if not ‘world-leading.’”</p> <p>Beijing’s national security law has created a legal framework to exercise its claims. China is increasing its presence in Antarctica through scientific projects, commercial ventures and infrastructure investments.</p> <p>Chinese military leaders describe the polar regions as “strategic frontiers” and zones for military competition with the West, analysts with the Brookings Institution said.</p>

Although seven countries — Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom — have made territorial claims to parts of Antarctica, no single nation claims sovereignty over the vast, icy region.

The southern polar region is governed by the Antarctic Treaty, signed in Washington in December 1959. The treaty among 54 countries mandates that Antarctica be used for “peaceful purposes only,” that no new territorial claims will be honored and that any scientific research gleaned on the continent be shared with all other nations.

China established Great Wall as its first research station in Antarctica in 1985 and built at least four others: Zhongshan, Kunlun, Taishan and a base on Inexpressible Island in the Ross Sea.

“Scientists maintain that Antarctica holds large reserves of natural resources. It is also strategically located for military and space operations,” according to The China Story website, which says China has the largest national investment on the continent.

The U.S. military, which has described China as its “pacing challenge,” is keeping a close watch on Beijing’s activities in Antarctica. The Pentagon announced this fall that it was deploying an additional 420 National Guard airmen to Antarctica as part of the military’s Operation Deep Freeze to support “climate research and other scientific activities.”

Asked whether China’s stepped-up activity in the region was a source of concern, Air Force Brig. Gen. Patrick S. Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters in October that the U.S. military was working “very closely with Australia and New Zealand on a variety of exercises throughout the region.”

“Certainly, we know that China has a presence in Antarctica,” Gen. Ryder said. “We continue to see in certain areas, particularly in the Arctic, where China has claimed that it’s an Arctic nation when it is not, that as much as [China] starts to compete for various resources in that area and to put defense capabilities in areas that are concerning, then that’s something that we’ll continue to keep an eye on.”

Dual-use

Some worry that Beijing will use its scientific bases in Antarctica for military purposes, such as helping the People’s Liberation Army enhance its satellite command and control features for a possible missile attack. According to a study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, China has installed ground satellite tracking stations at its Zhongshan and Kunlun polar research stations.

The Pentagon is concerned that China is increasing its presence in the Antarctic through benign-sounding scientific projects and investments in infrastructure, “likely intended to strengthen its position for future claims to natural resources and maritime access.”

Defense Department officials said China’s strategy in Antarctica includes the exploitation of “dual-use” technologies — facilities and research that have scientific purposes but could also improve the capabilities of the People’s Liberation Army.

“Beijing’s 2015 National Security Law identifies polar regions, along with deep sea and outer space, as areas for development and exploitation,” the Pentagon said in a recent report to Congress.

Australia’s role

About 30 countries operate dozens of research bases of varying sizes and capabilities on the barren, wind-swept continent.

Only a handful of countries recognize Australia’s claim of sovereignty over more than 40% of Antarctica, and the U.S. is not one of them. Washington says it also has the right to stake a claim in Antarctica but has not taken the step.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute says China's interests in Antarctica are based on economic, political, military and strategic interests, including access to Arctic and Antarctic minerals, fishing opportunities, hydrocarbons, and science and technology resources.

In February 2022, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a \$570 million initiative to boost Australia's presence in Antarctica. Plans included the use of drones and long-range helicopters to chart unexplored sections of the continent's interior.

While not identifying China by name, Mr. Morrison criticized countries that he said didn't have the best interests of Antarctica at heart.

"We are stewards of some of the most important and most sensitive environments anywhere in the world," he said, as reported by Voice of America. "We need to keep an eye on Antarctica because there are others who have different objectives."

Beijing shot back by accusing Mr. Morrison of "whining" about a nonexistent threat from China. The government-run Global Times accused Mr. Morrison of serving as a "pawn" of the U.S. government's anti-China policies.

"Australian politicians know well that China's legitimate scientific expeditions in the Antarctic region are not challenging its national security by any means," the Global Times reported. "Such false conjecture may provide material support for [their] anti-China agenda, but it is actually paranoia originating from their hostility toward China."

Mr. Stokes, the analyst at the Center for a New American Security, said China is engaged in legitimate scientific research in Antarctica, including efforts related to climate and environmental issues, but he agreed that some of Beijing's operations and assets in the region could be shifted to military use if necessary.

Officials in the Chinese Transportation Ministry have announced the development of a heavy icebreaker ship that could supplement at least two others that are being used for polar research projects.

"Those are state-owned icebreakers. They can definitely be leveraged in the future for military purposes," Mr. Stokes said.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Berlin to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/24/berlin-plans-to-send-german-leopard-tanks-to-ukraine-according-to-reports
GIST	<p>Berlin has reportedly succumbed to huge international and domestic pressure and is set to announce that it will send German-manufactured tanks to Ukraine that Kyiv says it needs to push back Russian forces, according to media reports on Tuesday evening citing government sources.</p> <p>It is reported to be planning to send a company of Leopard 2A6 battle tanks – usually comprising 14 of the vehicles – in conjunction with other partners, namely Scandinavian countries in possession of the units. Berlin is also understood to have said it would give its permission for export licences for countries such as Finland, Sweden and Poland who have bought the tanks from Germany, allowing them to be sent to Ukraine.</p> <p>The decision is expected to be made officially on Wednesday and Germany's chancellor, Olaf Scholz, is due to be questioned in the Bundestag in the morning in a debate likely to be dominated by the tank decision.</p>

The head of Volodymyr Zelenskiy's presidential administration immediately hailed the German reports. "This is what is going to become a real punching fist of democracy against the autocracy from the bog," Andriy Yermak wrote on Telegram.

The 2A6 version of the Leopard is the latest version of the tank, which was first developed for the West German army in 1979.

The decision marks a groundbreaking one for Germany, ending months of painful debate and soul-searching, with the move marking the first time that German tanks will have been used on the battlefield in Europe since the second world war.

Germany's historical responsibility as the instigator of that global conflict has been used by those arguing it has a moral obligation to send tanks to protect the victims of Russian aggression.

But at the same time, Germany's Nazi past has been precisely what has held back decision-makers who have been deeply fearful that increasing firepower through the deployment of tanks could escalate the conflict – and leave Germany in danger of being labelled as an aggressor.

No indication has been given on the timing of the tanks' arrival in Ukraine. The Leopard manufacturer Rheinmetall has said they could be ready to be dispatched by March. The defence minister, Boris Pistorius, said on Tuesday after a meeting in Berlin with Jens Stoltenberg, the general secretary of Nato, that he was encouraging countries with Leopards to start training Ukrainian soldiers in their use.

Berlin's decision, after months of insisting it would only act in an alliance, is thought to have come after high-level, often tense talks in the past few days between Berlin and Washington and to be directly connected to a decision reportedly in the process of being hammered out in Washington to send its Abrams battle tanks.

Kyiv, which has been appealing for the tanks since last April, has given repeated reassurances to Berlin in particular that the tanks would only be used for defence purposes.

Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, the chair of the parliamentary defence committee, who has been highly critical of Scholz's hesitancy, welcomed the decision even as she said it had come very late. "The decision was arduous, it took far too long, but in the end it was unavoidable," she said, calling it "redemptive news for the abused and brave people of Ukraine".

The deputy chair of the foreign committee in the Bundestag, Thomas Erndl of the conservative CSU, welcomed the decision, calling it "inevitable". He told the DPA press agency: "It is important that we are now leading a European alliance, so that Ukraine receives a significant number of Leopard 2 tanks and that the training [of Ukrainian soldiers in their use] can begin immediately."

But he criticised Scholz for a "massive weakness in decision-making", saying that it had led to an "enormous loss of trust in Germany, from Europe and the USA".

Lars Klingbeil, the head of the Social Democrats and a close colleague of Scholz's, defended the chancellor. "It annoys me immensely that this careful weighing up in this curtailed debate is presented as an attempt to disassociate ourselves from Ukraine," he told the left-leaning Berlin daily TAZ. "Olaf Scholz carries the responsibility as the German chancellor for what is a historic situation – not those who are constantly giving sly advice on Twitter or in Talkshows."

Earlier in the day, the Wall Street Journal reported that the US government was considering sending a considerable number of its Abrams tanks. France is also believed to be on the verge of announcing it will send its own tanks to Ukraine.

Last week, it was reported that Scholz had told Joe Biden that Germany would be prepared to send its Leopards – the most ubiquitous tank in Europe and considered to be the most practical and suitable for

use in staving off the Russian military – if the US sent its tanks. Biden was initially reported to have rejected the idea.

Some leading US military experts supported the idea even as they acknowledged that the gesture would be largely symbolic and would help enable Germany to make the difficult decision amid widespread concerns, in light of its war-mongering past, that the move could escalate the conflict with Berlin portrayed as the aggressor.

According to Spiegel, which broke the news on Tuesday evening, citing government sources, the Leopard tanks are believed to be in the ownership of the German military. Middle- to medium-term, tanks in the ownership of their manufacturer, Rheinmetall, could also be revamped and sent to Ukraine. However, this could take until the end of this year, Rheinmetall's chief executive said on Wednesday, saying that as some of the units had not been used for the best part of a decade, they were "mouldy inside" and needed to be almost completely reconstructed.

Scholz has been under immense pressure both at home, from within his own coalition government made up of his Social Democrats, Greens and the pro-business FDP, and internationally to make an announcement regarding the tanks.

The appearance of indecision and hesitation has earned him and Pistorius widespread scorn and accusations they could end up escalating the conflict by their inaction.

Earlier on Tuesday, Poland announced it had submitted an application to Germany requesting that it be allowed to send 14 of its Leopard tanks to Ukraine, with Berlin indicating that it would be prepared to grant the export licence.

The German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, appeared to pave the way for Warsaw to make its request on Sunday when she told French television in a surprise statement that Germany would not block the export of Leopard tanks to Ukraine from third countries.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Japan, NKorea winter weather warnings
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/25/japan-and-north-korea-sound-warning-as-deadly-cold-snap-sweeps-across-asia
GIST	<p>Weather authorities in Japan and the Korean peninsula have issued warnings over freezing temperatures and gales that have killed at least one person, and stranded thousands.</p> <p>Severe cold weather has already caused fatalities, havoc and record low temperatures across the region in the last fortnight, with at least 124 people dead in Afghanistan and record lows of -53C in northeastern China.</p> <p>Large parts of Japan are now in the grip of the severe cold spell, with some areas expected to experience their lowest temperatures for a decade. On Wednesday chief cabinet secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said one person had died as a result of the storm, and two other deaths were under investigation. In the Korean peninsula, temperatures of -25C were recorded near the border between North and South Korea on Tuesday.</p> <p>Heavy snowfall was predicted in central Japan and in the country's north-east for most of Wednesday, while winds could reach up to 126 kph areas across the country, the country's meteorological agency said. In the 24 hours to Wednesday morning, a record 93cm of snow was recorded in the city of Maniwa.</p> <p>In western Japan, some rail passengers were left stranded for several hours on Tuesday, according to West Japan Railway, while domestic airlines said they would cancel more than 200 flights Wednesday. Bullet train services in the country's north-east will also be suspended, the Kyodo news agency said.</p>

The Japan meteorological agency has said that some parts of the country could see their lowest temperatures for 10 years, and warned that the cold snap would continue until Thursday, with blizzards and violent winds expected along the Japan Sea coast.

Strong winds may also be behind the sinking of a Hong Kong-registered cargo ship in the seas between western Japan and South Korea's Jeju island on Wednesday morning, Reuters reported. Thirteen of the 22 crew members on board had been rescued but a search was continuing.

Officials have urged people to avoid non-essential journeys and to watch out for icy road conditions, public broadcaster NHK said. They have also warned that water pipes could freeze.

Subzero temperatures are expected Wednesday morning in Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost main island, and as far south as Kyushu. The mercury could drop to -3C in Tokyo and -2C in the western city of Osaka.

Frigid conditions are also being experienced across the Korean peninsula. South Korea's meteorological administration issued a special "cold wave" warning on Tuesday, as temperatures dropped as low as -16 C in Seoul and -25 C near the North Korean border on the coldest day of the season so far.

North Korean authorities have issued extreme cold weather warnings for the entire country, with temperatures forecast to drop to "dangerous lows" in some of its poorest regions, NK News reported.

The website quoted North Korea's central radio broadcaster as saying that temperatures in the north of the country could dip below -30 C. In the capital, Pyongyang, the temperature was -19C early Wednesday, well below average for this time of the year, NK News added.

The weather system has seen temperatures plunge below average across the region. In the last two weeks at least 124 people have died in Afghanistan in the freezing conditions. State officials told the BBC the weather was coldest recorded in decades, with parts of the country were completely cut off by snow. It has also killed about 7,000 head of livestock.

Parts of China have also seen their coldest days on record, including the town of Mohe, in the norther province of Heilongjiang, which dropped to -53C. On Tuesday authorities issued a "blue" warning – the lowest of four levels for severe weather.

The cold front saw temperatures in China plunge up to 16C below average. On Tuesday the meteorological agency warned that even as the cold wave dissipated, temperatures in central and eastern areas would stay below average for the next ten days or so.

In northern and central Taiwan, temperatures also plummeted with snowfall in some areas.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Day 336 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/25/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-336-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The United States appears poised to start a process that would eventually send dozens of its M1 Abrams battle tanks to Ukraine, US media reported, in a reversal that could have significant implications for Kyiv's efforts to repel Russian forces.• The move follows reports on Tuesday that Berlin has succumbed to huge international and domestic pressure and was set to announce that it will send German-manufactured tanks to Ukraine, and allow other countries to do the same.• The decision is expected to be made officially on Wednesday and Germany's chancellor, Olaf Scholz, is due to be questioned in the Bundestag in the morning in a debate likely to be dominated by the tank decision.• Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg said he was confident the alliance will find a solution soon, after meeting Germany's defence minister. "At this pivotal moment in the war,

	<p>we must provide heavier and more advanced systems to Ukraine, and we must do it faster,” Stoltenberg said.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Tuesday that Kyiv needed allies to decide on whether they would deliver modern tanks to strengthen the country’s defence against Russia. Zelenskiy said the issue was not about five, 10 or 15 tanks, as Ukraine’s needs are greater, but about reaching final decisions on real deliveries. “When the needed weighty decisions are made, we will be happy to thank you for each weighty decision,” Zelenskiy said. • In Ukraine, fifteen senior officials have left their posts since Saturday, six of whom have had corruption allegations levelled at them by journalists and Ukraine’s anti-corruption authorities. The deputy head of Ukraine’s presidential office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, said on Tuesday he had asked Zelenskiy on Monday to relieve him of his duties as part of the wave of government resignations and dismissals. • Deputy defence minister Vyacheslav Shapovalov, responsible for supplying troops with food and equipment, also resigned, citing “media accusations” of corruption that he and the ministry say are baseless. Deputy prosecutor general Oleksiy Symonenko has been removed from his post, and two deputy ministers resigned from Ukraine’s ministry of communities and territories development. • Five regional governors are also being removed from power: Valentyn Reznichenko, of Dnipropetrovsk, Oleksandra Starukha of Zaporizhzhia, Oleksiy Kuleba of Kyiv, Dymtro Zhivytyskiy, of Sumy and Yaroslav Yanushevich, of Kherson. Kherson and Zaporizhzhia are two of the regions of Ukraine which the Russian Federation has claimed to annex. • The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has set its Doomsday Clock, intended to illustrate existential risks to the world, at 90 seconds to midnight, the closest to midnight the clock has ever been since it was first introduced in 1947. It is “largely” because of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, they said. • Ukraine has enough coal and gas reserves for the remaining months of winter despite repeated Russian attacks on its energy system, prime minister Denys Shmyhal has said. • Finland’s foreign minister Pekka Haavisto has signalled a possible pause in discussions with Turkey over Finnish ambitions to join Nato alongside Sweden, which he says is due to the pressure of Turkey’s forthcoming election. • Supporters of jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny gathered for a protest in Berlin on Tuesday to highlight the prison conditions in Russia he is being kept in. • Russia does not plan to rebuild the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol which were the site of heavy bombardment in the early weeks of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last year. • Russian football officials met their counterparts at Uefa on Tuesday as they tried to negotiate Russia’s return to international football in Europe. It has been banned by Uefa and Fifa since the invasion of Ukraine.
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HEADLINE	01/24 Seattle Convention Center opening
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/opening-celebrations-seattle-convention-center/281-c8330a3c-01ee-4214-87bb-edc4359c6329
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Seattle Convention Center, a nearly \$2 billion project in the heart of downtown Seattle that has been years in the making, is set for its opening celebrations on Wednesday.</p> <p>The project doubled the capacity of the Seattle Convention Center, formerly known as the Washington State Convention Center, by adding 573,770 square feet of event space. There are now 62 meeting rooms, a 58,000-square-foot column-free and divisible ballroom featuring 3,900 suspended planks of reclaimed wood, 248,450 square feet of exhibit space, 140,700 square feet of naturally lit lobby space and the 14,000-square-foot outdoor Garden Terrace.</p> <p>Contractors broke ground on the Seattle Convention Center project in August 2018 after the center's board of directors determined the economic impact that would benefit the state of Washington if a second facility was added. In a release, the former convention center turned away more than 300 potential events because of the unavailability of space in the Arch Building on the dates desired.</p>

The [expansion hit a snag in January 2021](#) when the project was affected by the sudden drop in hotel/motel revenues in 2020. Project leader Matt Griffin said lodging taxes associated with travel and tourism were needed to pay back the bonds on the project, but revenue was decimated by the global pandemic. The project was over 30% complete when leaders asked for a federal bailout.

Years later, with the Seattle Convention Center's expansion completed, Seattle is now home to North America's first high-rise convention center.

Officials said there have been 58 events booked at the Seattle Convention Center, with eight using the Arch and the Summit simultaneously.

"We're thrilled for the new opportunities Summit together with Arch will create for our clients, community and industry," said Jeff Blosser, president and CEO. "The Seattle Convention Center is pleased to increase its availability of space for event planners and extend its connection to those who live in, visit or work downtown."

The Seattle Convention Center is believed to achieve LEED Gold certification, because "environmentally friendly" design elements were used during construction, including plant-based acoustic ceiling tiles and bio-based fabric panels. The rooftop has solar panels that will boost the building's energy performance by 30% over the baseline rating and a rainwater harvesting system to reduce irrigation usage by a projected 89%, according to figures provided by the center.

The new location is near about 7,000 hotel rooms within a six-block radius, according to a release. The Summit is off Interstate 5, giving access to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and is near the Link light rail and other public transportation.

The Seattle Convention Center has been in operation since 1988.

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HEADLINE	01/24 King Co. alarm over fentanyl-related deaths
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/health-officials-report-alarming-number-fentanyl-deaths-king-county/AOZW465MVZD7RECZN7N5VK6J6E/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — King County health officials are sounding the alarm.</p> <p>They say so many people are dying from drug overdoses the county morgue is filled to capacity. The numbers are alarming.</p> <p>More than 1,000 people in King County died from a drug overdose last year. On average, that's nearly three deaths a day, double the body count from 2020.</p> <p>Now the King County Medical Examiner is searching for additional space to accommodate those who died from an overdose.</p> <p>The main culprit in these deaths is fentanyl. By one estimate, fentanyl is the cause of 70% of these deaths.</p> <p>Even on the King County Medical Examiner, the very first case Tuesday was of a 33-year-old man who died in Seattle from fentanyl.</p> <p>"It's really quite stunning," said Dr. Caleb Banta-Green, an expert in opioid use disorder at the University of Washington Medical School.</p> <p>He says those dying from illicitly manufactured fentanyl are all across King County.</p>

	<p>“They’re men and women,” said Dr. Banta-Green. “They are young and old, while we have a much larger proportion who are under 30 than we ever saw with heroin or prescription-type opiates. So, we’re seeing a lot of young adults. We’re seeing it among African-American, Latinx populations. So, big changes, not just in terms of the numbers but really across our community.”</p> <p>This shows what amounts to an explosion of deaths from alcohol and drug overdoses since 2020.</p> <p>The number peaked at 1,000 last year. And now, not a whole month into the New Year, the number of deaths is closing in on 100.</p> <p>We met this man after he said he was turned away from an opioid treatment facility because he appeared to already be high. And the crisis has hit him in other ways, too. He says his roommate recently overdosed and died.</p> <p>The immeasurable toll of a deadly drug that is readily available on King County streets.</p> <p>Here at the Medical Examiner’s office, they say they are using autopsy gurneys, working with funeral homes and looking for additional cooler space for the long term.</p> <p>Dr. Banta-Green says all of this shows the need for more places to treat those who are addicted.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Safety concern: homeless camps along I-5
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/safety-concern-encampment-along-i-5-washington-state-department-of-commerce-washington-state-patrol-transportation-right-of-way-housing-homeless-ship-canal-rapid-housing-funding#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — There is a new safety concern over a homeless encampment along the I-5 express lanes in Seattle.</p> <p>The encampment sits just north of the Ship Canal Bridge on Washington State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT) right-of-way property.</p> <p>Drivers and residents said people living in the encampments are crossing the interstate to get to the other side and it's creating a danger for them and drivers.</p> <p>KOMO News reached out to WSDOT, the Washington State Department of Commerce, Washington State Patrol (WSP) and the city of Seattle to find out what the agencies are doing about the danger.</p> <p>A WSDOT spokesperson said in an email that kind of danger is part of the reason they are working to remove encampments along the interstate and confirmed the Ship Canal encampment is being addressed, but could not offer any other specifics.</p> <p>Residents who live nearby said the encampment has been cleared before but it keeps resurfacing and getting bigger. They estimate it has been in existence for months.</p> <p>"They are constantly crossing over back and forth and it is dangerous, I've heard horns honking. I'm worried about someone getting hurt or someone hurting somebody and having it on their conscience," said Troy a homeowner who lives nearby the encampment on the east side of the interstate.</p> <p>In the last month, Troy and others noticed a sign that borders the encampment on the west side of the Express Lanes, it reads 'Do Not Enter'. "I wouldn't enter, I wouldn't go in there," said Troy citing safety concerns.</p> <p>KOMO took the concerns of people crossing the interstate to Mayor Bruce Harrell Tuesday and asked him if the Ship Canal encampment is a priority.</p>

"I'm always careful what to say is a priority, because, as soon as I geographically identify one area, then someone with significant needs says, well I'm not prioritized," said Harrell.

He emphasized the city's strategy is to look at the full 84 square miles of the city with a strategic approach but described the Ship Canal encampment as a significant safety concern.

"When I see people living under bridges and state right of ways it prompts me to take the action we are taking. We have to house people and we have to treat people, I hope they listen to those in decision-making roles like myself because we have to do this work and I think it's getting done," said Mayor, noting the encampment "to some extent is not our property".

There's no timeline for when the encampment will be removed and the unhoused connected with housing and services, but WSDOT said Rapid Housing Funding from the Department of Commerce and the joint work of the Right of Way Safety Initiative are being put to use there.

"The Ship Canal Bridge is one of the areas we're focusing on as part of our overall efforts, including using new funds provided to the Department of Commerce by the Legislature to help move people off of inherently dangerous rights of way and toward shelter and the path to permanent housing. This is a partnership between several state agencies as well as county and city representatives and outreach groups," a spokesperson with WSDOT said.

WSDOT insists its responsibility and expertise are limited to clean up and restoration of the property but works closely with local partners who have access to the resources and human services required to provide a pathway to temporary and permanent housing.

KOMO News asked the agency if they have a timeline for that but were told it depends on housing availability, and those encampment removal timelines are not announced.

WSP said the encampments are part of Patrol's District 2, which includes all of King County, and that commanders and troopers are 'well aware of this particular area and are actively monitoring and addressing it as time and resources allow.

So far in 2023, there have been five reports in the area and the calls often involve people in crisis and/or sometimes experiencing homelessness known as 'Pedestrian Incidents' or PED reports. In 2022, there were 46 reports in the same area, according to WSP.

But for comparison, District 2 had more than 5,000 PED reports for all of 2022.

However, WSDOT's Traffic Management Center said they are not aware of any reports of people crossing the interstate near the encampment in the last month.

"The freeway is not designed for any sort of pedestrian traffic, and the danger to all involved is one of the prime motivators for the Right of Way Safety Initiative," said Chris Loftus with WSP. "Unhoused people occasionally darting through traffic in some areas is an unfortunate episodic outgrowth of the proximity of the camps to vehicular traffic, and WSP can respond to those episodes but usually after the fact and sometimes after the tragedy."

The state said the initiative efforts are currently focused on Interstate 5. It's the busiest major highway system, with hundreds of thousands of travelers per day. Those determinations are also made considering factors such as immediate safety risk to the traveling public, neighbors, and the people living within the encampment.

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SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-couple-explains-why-theyre-building-a-home-in-the-median-of-i-5-on-ramp-homeless-bruce-harrell-south-lake-union-downtown#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Drivers who enter I-5 at Seattle's Mercer Street on-ramp pass by a growing homeless encampment that is obscured behind trees and repurposed 'welcome to South Lake Union' banners.</p> <p>Inside the camp, Kandice and Mark, who asked to be identified only by their first names, are busy building their home.</p> <p>"99% of this house is stuff that came out of dumpsters," Mark told KOMO News. "We don't have a house or a home right now and this is how we know to survive."</p> <p>Mark said it's taken him about a month to build the tiny house, which includes an A-frame roof, foundation, window, and door. Mark says the couple ended up here after their previous encampment on Dexter street was cleared out by the city.</p> <p>"We found ourselves on the sidewalk with all our stuff just trying to guard it. We figured we'd build this structure here because it's better than just a tent," he said.</p> <p>The house is going up in the same encampment where KOMO reported last week about a series of fires, threats with weapons, and damage to the Seattle City and Light power infrastructure.</p> <p>The property where they are building the house belongs in part to the Seattle Department of Transportation and Washington Department of Transportation. Both agencies told KOMO they are aware of the encampment and coordinating on how to deal with it.</p> <p>"The process of outreach is time-intensive and involves building a relationship with people who often have complex needs, and then finding the housing and services that can meet those needs. KCRHA has worked with outreach partners to resolve a number of sites that had established structures, including a large encampment at Dearborn and other sites downtown," said Anne Martens with the King County Homelessness Authority.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell addressed the Mercer Street encampment in an interview with KOMO News on Tuesday.</p> <p>"What we are trying to do thru using utility discounts and our housing strategies is meeting people where they are and getting them sheltered in places they don't have to do that. It's unsafe, unlawful and we don't suggest people do that all it's intolerable for our administration," Harrell said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 US officials: M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/24/world/russia-ukraine-news#the-us-is-moving-closer-to-sending-its-best-tank-to-ukraine-officials-say
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Reversing its longstanding resistance, the Biden administration plans to send M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, U.S. officials said on Tuesday, in what would be a major step in arming Kyiv in its efforts to seize back its territory from Russia.</p> <p>The White House is expected to announce a decision as early as Wednesday, said the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions. One official said the number of Abrams tanks could be about 30.</p> <p>Over the past month, Pentagon officials had expressed misgivings about sending the Abrams, citing concerns about how Ukraine would maintain the advanced tanks, which require extensive training and servicing. And officials said it could take years for them to actually reach any Ukrainian battlefields.</p>

But Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III has now come around to the view that committing to sending American tanks is necessary to spur Germany to follow with its coveted [Leopard 2 tanks](#). Officials at the State Department and the White House argued that giving Germany the political cover it sought to send its own tanks outweighed the Defense Department reluctance, the officials said.

The movement toward sending the Abrams tanks, [first reported by The Wall Street Journal](#), follows a testy confrontation last week during [a NATO defense chiefs meeting](#) over the refusal by Germany's chancellor, Olaf Scholz, to send the Leopards, which many military experts believe could be a critical weapon in Ukrainian hands.

German officials privately insisted that they would send the tanks, among the most advanced in the world, only if the United States agreed to send its own M1 Abrams tanks.

Anticipation for a German announcement was high, as various German news outlets reported on Tuesday that Mr. Scholz had decided to send the tanks. Much of the attention focused on an expected address by the chancellor to Parliament on Wednesday.

Many European countries use German-built Leopards, which number about 2,000 across the continent, and Ukraine has pleaded for tanks in recent weeks, describing them as necessary to counter Russia's advantages in arms and men. Western tanks are the latest barrier to fall as Ukraine's allies supply it with weapons systems they had previously resisted sending; earlier this month, while debates over the Leopard and the Abrams wore on, Britain said it would give some of its Challenger 2 tanks.

On Tuesday, Poland's defense minister said his country [had formally requested Germany's permission](#) to send Ukraine Leopard tanks from its own stocks, and other countries have indicated they would do the same if Germany agreed.

In Kyiv on Tuesday, Finland's president, Sauli Niinisto, told reporters at a news conference that he had discussed the supply of Western tanks to Ukraine with President Zelensky, saying the country was considering various options for its participation.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Group: 20% Wagner recruits still active
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/24/world/russia-ukraine-news#an-advocacy-group-estimates-that-only-1-in-5-of-wagners-recruits-remain-active-in-russian-forces
GIST	<p>Out of 50,000 mercenaries — many of them prison inmates — recruited by the private paramilitary group Wagner to fight alongside regular Russian troops in Ukraine, only about 10,000 remain actively serving, according to a new estimate by Russia Behind Bars, a prisoner rights organization.</p> <p>The organization's founder, Olga Romanova, said in an interview on Monday with TV Rain, an independent Russian broadcaster based in the Netherlands, that according to her organization's data, the other 40,000 recruits have either deserted or surrendered, or been injured or killed.</p> <p>Wagner's mercenaries have played a large role in the battle for eastern Ukraine and have also carried out military operations in Africa and elsewhere. Human rights groups have said that the Kremlin is relying on the extralegal use of prisoners to replenish its decimated military.</p> <p>In September, a visual investigation by The Times revealed footage that appeared to be Yevgeny V. Prigozhin, the Russian businessman and close associate of President Vladimir V. Putin who founded Wagner, promising convicts release from prison in return for a six-month combat tour in Russia's war against Ukraine. In the video, he also warns that any who sign up and try to desert will be shot.</p> <p>The estimates by Russia Behind Bars could not be independently verified, but the overall number of fighters roughly aligns with a late December assessment shared by John Kirby, a spokesman for the</p>

	<p>National Security Council. Mr. Kirby said Wagner had about 50,000 people fighting in Ukraine at that time, including 10,000 contractors and about 40,000 inmates recruited from Russian prisons.</p> <p>In a statement earlier this month, the British Defense Ministry said that Russia was “highly resorting” to convict labor in an effort to meet wartime production demands.</p> <p>On Friday, the White House said the United States was designating the paramilitary group as a significant transnational criminal organization, a move that will expand the number of nations and institutions that can be prevented from doing business with the company.</p> <p>At a news briefing, Mr. Kirby told reporters, “Our message to any company that is considering providing support to Wagner is simply this: Wagner is a criminal organization that is committing widespread human rights abuses.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Several Ukraine officials fired: corruption
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/24/world/russia-ukraine-news#the-firings-come-amid-a-ballooning-corruption-scandal-involving-military-procurement
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Several top Ukrainian officials were fired on Tuesday, including the governors of several Ukrainian regions, amid a ballooning corruption scandal. The move marked the biggest upheaval in President Volodymyr Zelensky’s government since Russia’s invasion began 11 months ago.</p> <p>Ukraine’s cabinet ministry, which announced the firings on the Telegram social messaging app, provided no details about the reason, but it followed reports that Ukraine’s military had agreed to pay inflated prices for food meant for Ukrainian troops.</p> <p>Earlier on Tuesday, Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense said that Viacheslav Shapovalov, a deputy minister, had “asked to be fired” following the reports. The ministry said in a statement that relieving Mr. Shapovalov of his duties would “preserve the trust” of Ukrainians and the country’s international partners.</p> <p>While there was no sign that the procurement scandal involved the misappropriation of Western military assistance, the dismissals appeared to reflect Mr. Zelensky’s goal of reassuring Ukraine’s allies — which are sending billions of dollars in military aid — that his government would show zero tolerance for graft as it prepares for a possible new offensive by Moscow.</p> <p>In addition to the officials named on Tuesday, Mr. Zelensky’s own deputy, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, tendered his resignation. Mr. Tymoshenko, the deputy head of the presidential office, was well known domestically and internationally, often tasked with providing updates on the war. But Ukrainian journalists had raised questions about his lavish lifestyle and use of government resources.</p> <p>In particular, he had been criticized for zipping around in an expensive SUV that General Motors had donated for use in humanitarian missions.</p> <p>Ukraine was struggling to get control over flourishing corruption long before the invasion. But for many Ukrainians the sense of common struggle and unity throughout the war makes the idea that top officials might be undermining the country’s collective effort for their own gain particularly galling, especially if the corruption involves the military.</p> <p>Over the weekend, a Ukrainian newspaper reported that the Ministry of Defense had purchased food at inflated prices, including eggs at three times their cost. Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov called the allegations “absolute nonsense” and the product of “distorted information.”</p> <p>In its statement on Tuesday, the ministry emphasized that the “voiced accusations are unfounded and baseless,” but called Mr. Shapovalov’s request for dismissal “a worthy act in the traditions of European and democratic politics, a demonstration that the interests of defense are higher than any cabinets or chairs.”</p>

That it took three days for Mr. Shapovalov to step down raises serious questions about the Ministry of Defense's commitment to rooting out corruption, said Vitaliy Shabunin, the director of operations for the Anti-Corruption Action Center, a Kyiv-based nongovernmental organization.

"A new social contract emerged during the war between civil society, journalists and the government: We will not criticize you like we did before the war, but your reaction to any scandal and ineffectiveness must be as tough as possible," Mr. Shabunin said. "The position of the defense minister has broken this agreement."

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HEADLINE	01/24 Study: long Covid keeps many out of work
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/24/health/long-covid-work.html
GIST	<p>Long Covid is having a significant effect on America's work force, preventing substantial numbers of people from going back to work while others continue needing medical care long after returning to their jobs, according to a new analysis of workers' compensation claims in New York State.</p> <p>The study, published Tuesday by New York's largest workers' compensation insurer, found that during the first two years of the pandemic, about 71 percent of people the fund classified as experiencing long Covid either required continuing medical treatment or were unable to work for six months or more. More than a year after contracting the coronavirus, 18 percent of long Covid patients had still not returned to work, more than three-fourths of them younger than 60, the analysis found.</p> <p>"Long Covid has harmed the work force," said the report, by the New York State Insurance Fund, a state agency financed by employer-paid premiums. The findings, it added, "highlight long Covid as an underappreciated yet important reason for the many unfilled jobs and declining labor participation rate in the economy, and they presage a possible reduction in productivity as employers feel the strains of an increasingly sick work force."</p> <p>The report, which analyzed Covid-related claims from patients exposed to the virus at work, filed between Jan. 1, 2020, and March 31, 2022, and paid by the agency, provides a snapshot of the problem. The agency, one of the 10 largest workers' compensation insurers in the country, found that nearly a third of 3,139 Covid-related claims it paid met its definition of long Covid.</p> <p>Patients received coverage from the fund if they had a positive coronavirus test and the agency or a workers' compensation board determined that they had a high risk of having been exposed to the virus while at work, typically in environments like hospitals, grocery stores or transit systems. The report classified a case as long Covid if, after infection, a patient required medical treatment for 60 days or more or lost 60 or more days of work.</p> <p>"It's a pretty conservative estimate," said Gaurav Vasisht, executive director and chief executive officer of the insurance fund. "It's not capturing people who may have gone back to work and didn't seek medical attention and may still be suffering, so you know, they're just toughing it out."</p> <p>During the time frame of the report, claims for the 977 people the fund designated as having long Covid cost about \$17 million out of the approximately \$20 million paid to all Covid patients, officials said, adding that the proportion for lost wages was slightly greater than for medical treatment. But Mr. Vasisht cautioned that the dollar amounts provided only a partial picture because it was unclear how long people would need medical care or time off for long Covid.</p> <p>He added that the cost to patients went beyond money. "The longer you're out of work, the harder it is for you to get back to work, and that can stigmatize patients," Mr. Vasisht said. "It could be highly disruptive to their family and professional lives."</p>

Long Covid is defined by public health authorities as a constellation of symptoms that linger after the initial infection or that emerge weeks later and can include breathing problems, fatigue and brain fog. The [Government Accountability Office](#) estimated that long Covid has affected 7.7 million to 23 million people in the United States.

Katie Bach, a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who was not involved in the report, said the study showed that “we have a group of people who got long Covid and at least up until now have been unable to get back to work, and it is a nontrivial number of people.”

She said the report reflects only a slice of the work force: employees with workplace exposure to the virus who are knowledgeable enough about workers’ compensation to file claims. It might include employees who are younger or sicker than the overall working population, while also missing other workers with long Covid, said Ms. Bach, whose own [research](#) suggests that about 500,000 people in the United States are currently not working because of long Covid.

The New York report also found some optimistic signals. Since the pandemic’s first wave in early 2020, long Covid cases decreased as a percentage of workers’ compensations claims and of Covid-related claims. The decrease coincided with the advent of vaccines, which studies suggest [reduce the risk of long Covid](#), and with new coronavirus treatments, supporting the idea that if people can avoid becoming severely ill from their initial infection, they are less likely to experience long-term symptoms.

Still, Mr. Vasisht said the agency continued to receive claims for workers with long Covid, especially after surges in infections. The report also suggested that more employees than reflected in the data might have met the criteria for long Covid claims. The vast majority of all Covid-related claims, over 83 percent, were filed by essential workers — in occupations like health care, law enforcement and security services. But only 29 percent of their claims met the definition for long Covid, while 44 percent of nonessential workers met that definition.

That could be because “essential workers might not have been able to stay home from work beyond the required quarantine period,” the report said. And health care workers might have “self-treated their symptoms” rather than seeking medical care, the report said, adding “essential workers may have long Covid rates higher than the data suggests, creating a blind spot for policymakers.”

“A lot of people can’t afford to not work and so they’re working when they really shouldn’t be, continuing to work while they’re sick,” said Ms. Bach. She said that the experience of people with similar post-viral conditions like myalgic encephalomyelitis and chronic fatigue syndrome suggests that some people who work despite their long Covid may have harder recoveries. “When people who have a condition whose hallmark symptoms are fatigue and brain fog go into work, they’re not going to be as productive and they’re probably reducing their odds of improvement,” she said.

And because 40 percent of claimants with long Covid returned to work within 60 days of becoming infected while still receiving medical treatment, Mr. Vasisht said employers might receive “more requests for reduced hours or other accommodations.”

The study also found that doctors only used a specific long Covid diagnostic code in 30 cases, even though the code was added to the International Classification of Diseases in October 2021. “Physicians are underutilizing the I.C.D. code,” said Mr. Vasisht, adding that he believed his organization “can do a lot of good by conducting outreach to the physician community and letting them know about the research on long Covid and also about the existence of this I.C.D. code.”

Other findings were consistent with previously identified long Covid patterns, including [results of two 2022 studies](#) that analyzed [different workers’ compensation data sets](#). The most common long Covid symptoms included shortness of breath, fatigue, weakness, and cognitive and memory problems.

Women appeared to be at greater risk than men, as were people who became sick enough from their initial infection to be hospitalized and those with previous conditions like lung disease, hypertension, obesity and

	<p>depression. Adults older than 60 were less likely to resume working than younger employees, which might indicate that some long Covid patients are retiring early, adding to labor shortages, Ms. Bach said.</p> <p>Overall, said David Cutler, an economics professor at Harvard who has researched the cost of long Covid and was not involved in the study, “The report shows that even if Covid deaths are down, Covid is not over, and it won’t be for some time.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Abortion rights supporters rally at Capitol
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/abortion-rights-supporters-rally-outside-wa-capitol/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA — Alicia Hupprich stood outside the state Capitol on Tuesday alongside over 70 other abortion rights advocates, wearing pink and holding signs to protect a woman’s right to choose.</p> <p>Behind her, almost 20 anti-abortion activists wore red and held large signs picturing alleged fetuses at the time of abortion.</p> <p>Hupprich shared her personal story to show support for upcoming reproductive rights bills in the 2023 legislative session.</p> <p>In 2015, Hupprich drove from her home in Washington, D.C., to New Jersey to get an abortion after discovering the daughter she was pregnant with had a heart condition. She said there was only one doctor who could perform abortions after 18 weeks anywhere remotely close to her. And she had to pay for her abortion since her insurance did not cover any abortion costs under the Hyde Amendment.</p> <p>“The patients that need to access abortion are human beings with full lives, are not a number on a spreadsheet,” Hupprich said. “We need to prioritize giving autonomy to individuals to make the best health care decisions for their unique situations.”</p> <p>Different generations stood together on the steps of the Capitol for the rally organized by Pro-Choice Washington including groups like ACLU Washington, Cedar River Clinics, Planned Parenthood and Legal Voice.</p> <p>Holding a sign saying “Ruth Sent Us,” Amy Myers chuckled while reminiscing that she had to protest for the same right 50 years ago.</p> <p>“I hope it just goes through real easy and Washington state gets its law in the constitution,” Myers said.</p> <p>Myers and others were joined by state Attorney General Bob Ferguson; House Speaker Laurie Jenkins, D-Tacoma; Sen. Emily Randall, D-Bremerton; Sen. Yasmin Trudeau, D-Tacoma; Rep. Sharlett Mena, D-Tacoma; Rep. Marcus Riccelli, D-Spokane; and Rep. Darya Farivar, D-Seattle.</p> <p>Analyn Babcock came to the Capitol with her toddler to testify against the proposed bills.</p> <p>“I don’t think any humans have the right to end another human’s life,” Babcock said.</p> <p>Babcock said she used to be for abortion rights, but she has since changed her mind.</p> <p>“I came here today looking for common ground, hoping to speak and strike relationships with people,” Babcock said. “And I hope that they also would like to hear us out.”</p> <p>After abortion rights activists finished making their remarks, a counterprotester yelled out, “What does God think about the decision of taking a life?”</p> <p>The two sides then briefly yelled at each other, until dispersing to attend hearings or go elsewhere.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Seattle: free transit cards to public housing
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/seattle-will-give-free-transit-cards-to-all-public-housing-residents/
GIST	<p>Moxie Hubbard-Shirley and her 14-year-old twins moved from Indiana to Seattle in 2021, but she said they've yet to see all the city's neighborhoods, or even set foot on a saltwater beach. A map in their apartment marks where they've gone by transit.</p> <p>They now plan to cover more territory, thanks to a new city of Seattle program giving zero-fare ORCA cards to all Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) residents.</p> <p>"Washington has loved on us since we've been here," said Hubbard-Shirley, who says she's amazed by the region's myriad buses, ferries, trains and especially the First Hill Streetcar, which runs past her Yesler Terrace apartment. "One of my goals with my daughters is to ride all the lines with a card."</p> <p>An estimated 10,000 people will receive the black farecards at an estimated cost to taxpayers of \$2.2 million per year, city staff said.</p> <p>Mayor Bruce Harrell, Seattle Department of Transportation Director Greg Spotts, and SHA Executive Director Rod Brandon announced the new service Tuesday at the Hinoki Apartments along Yesler Way. It expands on a city pilot project serving 2,000 SHA residents.</p> <p>Others already were using the regional ORCALift card, which allows trips for \$1. For people on fixed incomes, who must count every dollar, zero-fare rides "give people more flexibility in their day," Brandon said.</p> <p>"We will not be the city of our dreams, we will not be a world class city, unless and until we realize or recognize the value of people that come from limited means that are lower income," Harrell said.</p> <p>The SHA farecards are funded by a sales tax voters passed in 2020, and they're valid through 2026. It formerly subsidized free ORCA fares for all youths, but the 2022 Legislature passed statewide free youth fares, underwritten by new carbon taxes. That move gave SDOT a new cash source that it shifted to public-housing residents, explained Laura Lee Sturm, transportation access manager.</p> <p>It's just the latest in a series of fare discounts. Besides youth and public-housing cards, Seattle has provided 2,200 free-fare "ORCA Recovery" cards to restaurant employees and other essential workers in the Chinatown International District, Pioneer Square, Othello and Rainier Beach neighborhoods, until at least Aug. 31, 2023. Another 1,300 community college students in Seattle hold free-fare cards.</p> <p>Regional ORCA Lift cards, promoted by King County Executive Dow Constantine in 2015, have spread to Snohomish and Pierce counties; by now at least 17 U.S. transit agencies have created low-income farecards. Some transit systems also waived fares early in the COVID-19 pandemic and have made rides free on New Year's Eve to promote traffic safety. Businesses buy farecards in bulk to provide an employee benefit.</p> <p>Metro and Sound Transit are not consistently enforcing fares as of early 2023, though most riders still pay.</p> <p>A step to free transit?</p> <p>The new zero-fare service raises the question: Should the Seattle area seek to offer free transit for everybody? Some cities are considering that option, including Washington, D.C., which is scheduled to make city buses free July 1.</p> <p>"That should be our goal," Harrell said, noting that Seattle is moving in that direction by extending free and low fares to residents that most need them. "I think it's doable and it's achievable."</p> <p>Fares comprise just a fraction of transit budgets, but millions are at stake.</p>

	<p>Metro collected \$150 million in fares in 2019, with a goal to cover one-fourth of the agency's operating costs. A county budget summary says it would need to replace fare revenue "or service would likely need to be cut."</p> <p>Another question is whether cheap farecards boost regional transit use. Sound Transit reported last week that ORCA Lift enrollment, after a slump during the pandemic, increased since August by 22% to 54,000 cardholders, still lagging the potential market of 105,000 low-income residents.</p> <p>Sound Transit doesn't have enough data yet to conclude the addition of roughly 10,000 ORCA Lift holders led to more trips, fares director Chad Davis reported last week.</p> <p>But SDOT reports 91% of survey respondents said they rode more transit after obtaining a free Recovery card, a statement Hubbard-Shirley would endorse.</p> <p>"I love meeting every type of person, so I want to say thank you all for even providing that transit," she said. "It is so major for me and my family."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Metro morgue capacity strained by fentanyl
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/fatal-overdoses-staffing-morgue-capacity-issues/281-d31b1957-2707-4ba1-825a-22a98b772728
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — A comment at the most recent King County Board of Health Meeting has sparked a lot of controversy and discussion around the drug epidemic impacting western Washington.</p> <p>"The medical examiner's office is now struggling with the issue of storing bodies because the fentanyl related death toll continues to climb," said King County Public Health Director Dr. Faisal Khan.</p> <p>He said it was an indicator of how bad things got at the end of 2022 and how they will be in 2023. Dr. Khan said the Medical Examiner's (ME) office has finite space in the coolers they use and the space is being exceeded on a regular basis. He noted this is an issue across the country in many major metro areas.</p> <p>KING 5 reached out to King County Public Health to talk about this issue. They sent us a statement, which said fatal overdoses aren't the only reason why they're running out of space. The statement read, in part:</p> <p>"We have options for temporary morgue surge capacity when our census count gets high, including storing decedents on autopsy gurneys and partnerships with funeral homes. We're exploring longer-term options for adding more capacity."</p> <p>Nicole Daugherty, the operations manager at the Snohomish County Medical Examiner's Office, provided some insight on other reasons why morgue capacity has become an issue for many counties in western Washington.</p> <p>Daugherty says staffing has been issue.</p> <p>"There's a national shortage of forensic pathologists, the doctors who perform autopsies," she said. " We typically have three, but in 2022, we lost two of ours. We just hired another and then we have one more coming in March."</p> <p>That shortage, Daugherty said, means if they have 23 bodies in their morgue on a Monday, it's going to take at least until Tuesday for their office to process them.</p> <p>Morgue capacity is also impacted by a state law that requires ME's offices to keep bodies for 90 days.</p>

"We are required by law to keep them for 90 days, do due diligence, check for next of kin. If you have indigent cases, they're going to sit in your morgue for 90 plus days and we've been having more and more of those," Daugherty said.

The impact of the pandemic is also still a factor in morgue capacity issues according to Daugherty.

"I kind of think the effects beyond COVID itself, people delaying medical care, increase alcohol usage, all sorts of stuff like that are causing more people to die their house."

When someone dies in their home, funeral homes prioritize picking up those bodies versus the ones in morgues, according to Daugherty.

Overdose deaths in Snohomish County went from 254 in 2021 to 276 in 2022. A majority of that, Daugherty said, was from fentanyl. They're expecting that to get worse as well, compounding their space issue.

Finally, physical space is also a problem. Many morgues, especially their cooling areas where they keep the bodies, were built with certain capacity limits.

"It would more prudent to move to a new building with a larger capacity as opposed to tacking on here, but while we are here, we're looking for a more efficient racking system and utilizing partners that come available."

Daugherty says you can help morgues where you live by making arrangements ahead of time for after life care. That helps move bodies out of morgues faster and prevents you from having to handle business while you're grieving.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Rwanda fires on Congo military aircraft
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-government-rwanda-e5369010e5fde37f9175abee87060a7
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Rwanda has fired on a Congolese military aircraft it alleges violated its airspace in a new escalation of tensions between the neighbors that has set off alarm across central Africa.</p> <p>A Rwandan government statement said “defensive measures” were taken against a Sukhoi-25 from Congo on Tuesday evening, and it urged Congo to “stop this aggression.” Rwanda’s state broadcaster shared unverified video of what appeared to be a projectile fired at an aircraft.</p> <p>Congo’s government in a statement asserted that the Rwandan attack on its fighter plane occurred in Congolese airspace near the city of Goma’s international airport and that the plane had not entered Rwandan airspace. It said the plane landed without major damage.</p> <p>Congo considers this “a deliberate act of aggression that equals an act of war” with the goal of sabotaging regional peace efforts, the statement said.</p> <p>The incident occurred a week before Pope Francis arrives in Congo’s capital, Kinshasa, for a three-day visit to highlight the toll that decades of conflict have taken on the country, particularly eastern Congo, a volatile region rich in minerals critical to much of the world’s technology.</p> <p>Congo for months has accused Rwanda of supporting a rebel group called M23, one of dozens that’s fighting in eastern Congo.</p> <p>To Rwanda’s displeasure, powerful voices in the West have openly agreed. United Nations experts last month said they have “substantial evidence” of Rwandan government forces crossing into Congo to reinforce M23 rebels or to conduct operations against another rebel group that includes fighters accused of</p>

	<p>taking part in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The United States, France and Germany have urged Rwanda to stop supporting the rebels.</p> <p>The Rwandan government has called accusations that it is supporting M23 “wrong” and part of a “tired old blame game” undermining efforts by regional leaders to find a lasting peace, “to which Rwanda is fully committed.”</p> <p>Rwanda also accuses Congo of supporting another rebel group that reportedly includes ethnic Hutus who participated in the genocide that killed more than 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them. The U.N. experts said they found evidence of support by some Congolese forces to armed groups.</p> <p>The public pressure on Rwanda is notable. Human rights watchdogs and others have long accused Rwanda of using the international community’s guilt over its delayed response to the genocide to dampen criticism of its actions including the stifling of opposition at home and abroad.</p> <p>At a Nov. 23 summit in Angola, which included Congo’s president and Rwanda’s foreign minister, regional leaders called for a cease-fire in eastern Congo to be followed by a withdrawal of rebels from major towns under M23 control. The armed group said it would withdraw from some of the occupied territories before Jan. 15, but some areas remain under its control.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 High ranking Russia officials defecting
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/25/europe/russia-fsb-defectors-osechkin-intl-cmd/index.html
GIST	<p>Vladimir Osechkin says he was walking toward his dining room table, plates of spaghetti for his children in his hands, when he spotted the red laser dancing across the wall.</p> <p>He knew what was coming.</p> <p>Slamming off the lights, he says he and his wife pulled their children to the ground, hurrying out of sight and into a different area of the apartment. Minutes later, Osechkin says, a would-be assassin fired, mistaking hastily arrived police officers for the Russian dissident.</p> <p>For the next 30 minutes, Osechkin told CNN, his wife and children lay on the floor. His wife, nearest their children, shielded them from more bullets during the September 12 attack.</p> <p>“The last 10 years I do a lot of things to protect the human rights and other people. But in this moment, I understood that my mission to help other people created a very high risk to my family,” Osechkin told CNN from France, where he’s lived since 2015 after he fled Russia and claimed asylum. He now has full-time police protection.</p> <p>He’s become the champion of a growing number of high-level Russian officials defecting to the West, emboldened and disgruntled by the Kremlin’s war in Ukraine. He says ex-generals and intelligence agents are among their number.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin has shown his determination to hunt the Kremlin’s perceived enemies overseas. Osechkin has been arrested in absentia in Russia and is currently on the Russian authorities “wanted list.” France has provided him sanctuary, but security is far harder to come by.</p> <p>Osechkin’s work as an investigative journalist and anti-corruption activist – which means he has made it his business to know the secrets of the Russian state – helps to a degree. Twice, he tells CNN, tip-offs have beaten the killers to his door.</p> <p>“Vladimir, be careful,” a source in the Chechen diaspora texted him in February. “There has already been an offer for an advance payment to eliminate you.”</p>

Osechkin's response is chillingly calm. "Good evening. Wow. And how much is offered for my gray head?"

Osechkin now lives under constant armed guard, provided by the French authorities, his address and routine are secret.

Making powerful enemies

As an influential human rights activist and journalist, Osechkin has long been a thorn in the side of many powerful Russians. After founding Gulagu.net in 2011 – a collaborative human rights organization targeting corruption and torture in Russia – he has overseen a string of high-profile investigations accusing Russian institutions and ministries of crimes. One alleged the systematic rape of male prisoners in Russian prisons.

But it was Gulagu.net's work since Russian tanks rolled across the Ukrainian border in February that gave the organization newfound international relevance.

The prison investigation inspired one group of officers from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) – the successor to the Soviet Union's KGB – to turn whistleblower, driven by what the officers said was their "disgusted surprise" at Gulagu.net's findings, Osechkin said. This led to #windofchange, a series of letters purportedly from FSB personnel shared with Osechkin's organization. Published online by Osechkin's team, they detailed their dissent with Russia's direction and war in Ukraine.

Putin's so-called "special military operation" wasn't the only movement of Russians after February 24. It also sparked "a big wave" of Russian officials leaving their homeland, Osechkin said, dwarfed only by the flood of men fleeing the Kremlin's "partial mobilization" order in September. Now, he told CNN, "It's every day some people ... ask [for] our help."

Many are low-level soldiers, but among them are far bigger prizes: Osechkin says their number include an ex-government minister and a former three-star Russian general – CNN has confirmed the identities of an ex-FSB officer and [Wagner mercenaries](#).

In January, Osechkin helped a former Wagner commander who [fled Russia on foot](#) into neighboring Norway to claim asylum. The ex-soldier was in fear for his life after refusing to renew his contract with the mercenary group.

"When the person is in the very high level, they understand very well how the machine of Putin's regime worked and they have a very good understanding that if they open [up about it], it's very high risk of the act of terrorism with Novichok or killers," Osechkin told CNN. Novichok was the nerve agent used in a 2018 attack on former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in Salisbury, England. The UK government assessed that the Russian government "almost certainly" approved the poisoning; Moscow denied involvement.

Implicit in such officials' escape from Russia through Osechkin's network is an agreement to provide him with information about Moscow's inner workings. Some of that ends up in the hands of European intelligence agencies, with whom Osechkin has regular contact, he said.

One former senior FSB lieutenant who Osechkin is helping in Europe, Emran Navruzbekov, said he prepared FSB directives on Russia's espionage operations in Europe to offer Western intelligence agencies.

"Our FSB bosses asked their agents in Europe to find out about the 'mercenaries' who would go to Ukraine. Volunteers who go to fight for Ukraine they call terrorists. I kept such correspondence," he told CNN.

Some of those that Osechkin helps carry information – even military secrets – that he admits is of limited interest to his human rights organization. But Western intelligence agencies have very different priorities.

Michel Yakovleff, an ex-French army general and former deputy commander of NATO operations, who at CNN's request reviewed several military files obtained by Osechkin, said that while they may not hold much importance for a military commander, "these are bits of intelligence. Even if they are individually moderately interesting, they build up a picture. And that is the interest of intelligence gathering."

Secrets on paper

One ex-Russian general brought with him military documents including an architectural plan of a building, according to Osechkin, with a legend detailing the meaning of the symbols, listing utilities and construction dates.

The general, seeking to win European favor, hoped Western authorities would see their value, Osechkin said. Intelligence sources have confirmed the likely authenticity of the documents to CNN but raised questions over their utility and exclusivity.

For Yakovleff, documents aren't the only currency defectors hold.

"The real questions are, where were you in the hierarchy? How trusted were you? Who were the trusted people around you? What kind of access did you have to what?" he said.

"We're not interested in that file. We're interested in your degree of access. And quite often it's the things that you know, but [which] you don't know [that you know] that are marketable" to intelligence services, Yakovleff added.

Alongside the military documents, the ex-Russian general ferried information on corruption within the military and secret recordings showing how the FSB pulls the strings even within military units, Osechkin said.

Another defector, 32-year-old Maria Dmitrieva, escaped with purported secrets from within the FSB's ranks. She told CNN that she had worked for a month as a doctor for the FSB. In preparation for her defection, she says she secretly recorded conversations with patients, whose symptoms sometimes hid state secrets.

One operative with the infamous GRU – or Russian military intelligence – was suffering from malaria after an unpublicized mission in Africa, she said. Other conversations revealed Chechen officials being given judicial impunity, she alleged, or officials discussing the collapse in the Russian army.

CNN has been unable to verify this independently.

Dmitrieva, who is seeking asylum in the south of France, leaving behind her family and her boyfriend who she says works for Russian intelligence, is unsure whether the information she provided to authorities will be enough to guarantee her permanent asylum.

A reason to flee

"You need good reasons to defect," Yakovleff said. "It's not all of a sudden, [that] 'it dawned upon me that democracy is better than tyranny, and therefore here I am.'"

"That's one of the first questions [intelligence agencies] are going to have. 'Why is this person defecting now?'" he added.

Ex-FSB officer Navruzbekov claimed that desperation over Russia's chances in Ukraine was driving many of his colleagues to look for an escape.

"Now in the FSB it's every man for himself, everyone wants to escape from Russia. Every second FSB officer wants to run away," he told CNN.

“They already understand that Russia will never win this war, they will just go out of their way to find some solution,” he said.

For Dmitrieva too, the war in Ukraine was the trigger. She said that she hopes to inspire others inside the system to undermine Putin’s regime.

“I am not afraid of anyone except the Almighty. Because it is important for me that by my action I can set an example for my compatriots, fellow security officials, enforcers,” she said.

She left behind more than her family in Moscow. Dmitrieva says her position afforded her unique privileges, including a luxury car with state number plates and an office with views of the defense ministry. She says she has no regrets about leaving.

“What inspires me the most is that I am sure that I am taking the correct actions to stop what’s happening so that less people will die,” Dmitrieva said.

“Putin and his retinue and everyone who approves of this war – these people are murderers. Why are [you] bothering this country that has been fine for 30 years?”

Osechkin said that the Ukrainian heritage and family ties of many Russian officials played a key role in their defection, prompting them to join a years-long exodus of journalists and human rights defenders from Russia.

“There is no truth in this war,” he said. “It’s the war of the one man who wants to save his power, his control over Russia and who wants to enter it in the international history and books in schools.”

As a result of his work aiding in the escape of whistleblowers from Russia, Osechkin has become something of a beacon for defectors, who know that he has the contacts with Western authorities and public profile to ensure the most effective treatment of the secrets they smuggle out.

A cuckoo in the nest

Wary of attempts by Moscow to infiltrate his organization and discredit his work, his colleagues verify the identity of all those that they help, Osechkin said.

Even so, one man posing as a defector embarrassed Gulagu.net, his apparent motives – not to actually defect – only revealed after Osechkin had streamed four interviews with him on the organization’s YouTube channel. In a video interview with another blogger, the impostor criticized Osechkin’s level of care toward him once he was in Europe. Osechkin admits this can make it harder for real whistleblowers to trust him.

Osechkin argues that the “real secret agents of the Russian Federation” don’t need his help to enter Europe.

European allies have taken an increasingly aggressive stance against Russian spying after a string of Russian attacks, including the 2014 occupation of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine, the Skripal poisoning in the UK and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February.

This year, 600 Russians have been expelled from European countries, 400 of whom were spies, according to the British intelligence services. Many were working as diplomats.

Osechkin also feels that Putin’s invasion of Ukraine is a turning point for the Russian leader, undoing decades of Russian stability under his power.

“He has a lot of enemies in his system because they worked with him [for] more than 20 years for the stability and for the money and for a beautiful life for the next generations. And now, in this year, Putin annulled this perspective of their life,” he said.

HEADLINE	01/25 Storm continues to threaten South, Midwest
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/25/weather/south-northeast-storms-wednesday/index.html
GIST	<p>More than a dozen reported tornadoes struck across communities in Texas and Louisiana, damaging many homes and businesses as windows and roofs were blown off buildings – and the threat is expected to persist Wednesday in other southern states.</p> <p>A massive, multi-day storm is bringing different impacts to a large swath of the US this week, with parts of Alabama, Florida and Mississippi under a tornado watch through 5 a.m. Wednesday while snow is also in store for the Midwest.</p> <p>“A winter storm will move into the Mid-Mississippi Valley by Wednesday morning. Areas of heavy snow and a wintry mix over Oklahoma and the Ozarks will expand northeastward into the Ohio Valley through early Wednesday,” the National Weather Service said on Twitter.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the storm inflicted extensive damage to the Houston-area communities of Deer Park and Pasadena, where downed trees and debris littered streets and thousands were without power after lines were knocked down.</p> <p>“We’ve seen plenty of damage. We’ve seen buildings that have collapsed,” Pasadena Mayor Jeff Wagner said.</p> <p>Josh Bruegger, the city’s police chief, described the damage as the worst he has seen in 25 years, adding, “For the coming days, we’re going to have our hands full.”</p> <p>In Deer Park, people who were at St. Hyacinth Catholic Church hunkered down in a hallway and closed all doors as they heard what they believe to be a tornado roll through the area, Father Reginald Samuels said.</p> <p>“It got really loud, we heard glass breaking, and the building was shaking then it was calm,” Samuels told CNN, adding that no one was hurt.</p> <p>Damage was also reported at a Deer Park nursing home, prompting the evacuation of about 60 residents Tuesday afternoon, Mayor Jerry Mouton told CNN. There were no reports of injuries, according to Jerry Dilliard with the Atascocita Fire Department. CNN reached out to the nursing home’s operator Tuesday for more information.</p> <p>As clean-up efforts are underway in Deer Park, schools in the city will close Wednesday, the district said.</p> <p>“We hope this will give families a chance to recover from the stress of today’s events, and we believe it is best for children to be with their parents or guardians after a natural disaster,” the district said in a statement sent to parents and employees Tuesday night.</p> <p>“It appears many homes and businesses in our area were damaged, and some neighborhoods remain without power at this time,” the statement continued.</p> <p>Photos of damage in Deer Park show tree limbs lying on roads, roofs flown off buildings and damaged vehicles.</p> <p>More than 100,000 homes and businesses in Texas and Arkansas were left in the dark early Wednesday morning, according to the tracking site PowerOutage.us. As of 9 p.m. ET, at least 14 tornadoes had been reported across southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana.</p>

	<p>In Louisiana's Beauregard Parish, the sheriff's office reported significant damage to homes and other buildings, noting that roads were blocked and power lines were down. Nearly 16,000 homes and businesses were also without power in Louisiana early Wednesday morning.</p> <p>Overall, there were no reports of serious injuries associated with Tuesday's storm damage, with Pasadena officials reporting one injury.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Children seeking asylum disappear in UK
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/missing-uk-children-asylum-seeking-disappear/
GIST	<p>Approximately 200 children who were seeking asylum in the United Kingdom have gone missing from hotels where they were being housed, Britain's immigration minister told members of Parliament on Tuesday. Robert Jenrick called the situation "extremely concerning," BBC News reported.</p> <p>Jenrick said that out of 4,600 asylum-seeking children who had arrived in the U.K. since 2021, 440 had gone missing, but half had returned to their accommodations. He said the majority of the missing children are teenage boys from Albania, and that he had not seen evidence that they had been abducted.</p> <p>Asylum-seekers who make it to the U.K. are often housed in hotels while their asylum cases are processed. This can take many months.</p> <p>Opposition lawmaker Yvette Cooper said there was "a criminal network involved" in removing the children from the hotels where they were staying, and that the government was "completely failing to stop them," according to BBC News.</p> <p>Over the weekend, the British newspaper The Observer reported that dozens of children had been kidnapped by gangs from a hotel housing asylum-seekers in the English coastal city of Brighton. CBS News cannot independently verify this report.</p> <p>"Children are literally being picked up from outside the building, disappearing and not being found. They're being taken from the street by traffickers," an unnamed whistleblower from a company contracted by the British government told The Observer.</p> <p>Britain's Home Office said that it was not true that children were being kidnapped, The Observer reported, and that they were free to leave their accommodations.</p> <p>"It is a total dereliction of duty," Cooper said, "for the Home Office to so badly fail to protect child safety or crack down on the dangerous gangs putting them in terrible risk. Ministers must urgently put new protection arrangements in place."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Russia spring offensive to turn wide of war?
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/putin-eyes-major-spring-offensive-isw-1775976
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin is preparing to launch a fresh offensive in Ukraine in the spring or early summer, according to one of the world's leading military think tanks.</p> <p>A daily campaign assessment from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) noted that Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) representative Vadym Skibitsky said on January 20 that Russian troops are regrouping in preparation for a "big offensive" in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.</p> <p>The ISW also reported Skibitsky said that Russian forces are unlikely to launch an attack from Belarus from the northern border, despite doing so when they launched "the special military operation" on Ukraine nearly a year ago.</p>

"ISW has previously assessed that Russian forces may be preparing for a decisive effort (of either offensive or defensive nature) in Luhansk Oblast and observed a redeployment of conventional forces such as Airborne (VDV) elements to the Svatove-Kreminna axis after the Russian withdrawal from Kherson Oblast," the think tank said. "ISW also maintains that it is highly unlikely that Russian forces are planning to relaunch a new offensive on northern Ukraine from the direction of Belarus."

"Skibitsky's assessments largely support ISW's running forecasts of Russian intentions in the first half of 2023 and underscore the continued need for Western partner support to ensure that Ukraine does not lose the initiative to a renewed Russian offensive operation.

Newsweek has contacted the Russian Ministry of Defense for comment.

Since Putin launched his "special military operation" in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Russia has made some progress in the east and south of Ukraine, but has been met with fierce opposition in some regions and lost captured territories to counteroffensives from Kyiv. In response to the frustration on the battlefield, Russia has struck critical Ukrainian energy infrastructure with missiles in recent months.

Wagner Overly Reliant on Prisoners

The [Wagner Group](#) of mercenaries has been playing a critical role in the fighting, and is said to account for around 10 percent of all Russian fighters in Ukraine.

The ISW assessment said that Wagner's "outsized reliance" on recruitment from penal colonies appears to be having increasing ramifications for the group's combat capability. It noted that the independent Russian human rights organization Rus Sidyashchaya (Russia Behind Bars) claimed on Monday that out of the assessed 50,000 prisoners that Wagner has recruited, only 10,000 are fighting on frontlines in Ukraine due to high casualty, surrender, and desertion rates.

"ISW cannot independently confirm these figures, but they are very plausible considering Wagner's model of using convicts as cannon fodder in highly attritional offensive operations," the report said.

"The Wagner Group aim of reducing casualties among its non-convict mercenaries likely undermines its ability to retain and use effectively its large mass of convicts at scale and over time."

The think tank also said that Russia was continuing to deepen military and economic ties with Iran, as both countries have been sanctioned by the Western world. Russia has used Iranian-made Shahed drones in its war against Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Classified documents found at Pence home
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mike-pence-classified-documents-indiana-home/
GIST	<p><i>Washington</i> — A "small number" of documents with classified markings were discovered last week at former Vice President Mike Pence's Indiana home and turned over to the FBI, his lawyer told the National Archives and Records Administration.</p> <p>In a letter dated Jan. 18, attorney Greg Jacob told an official with the Archives that a Pence aide conducted searched the home last week following the discovery of classified documents at President Biden's Wilmington, Delaware, home and former office at a Washington, D.C., think tank.</p> <p>"The additional records appear to be a small number of documents bearing classified markings that were inadvertently boxed and transported to the personal home of the former Vice President at the end of the last Administration," Jacob wrote to Kate Dillon McClure, acting director of the Archives' White House Liaison Division. "Vice President Pence was unaware of the existence of sensitive or classified documents at his personal residence."</p>

Two people familiar with the matter told CBS News that Pence's longtime aide Matt Morgan found the documents. [CNN](#) was first to report the discovery on Tuesday.

Jacob, who served as Pence's top lawyer in the White House, said Pence "engaged outside counsel, with experience in handling classified documents" on Jan. 16 to review records kept in his home in the wake of reports regarding documents marked classified found in Mr. Biden's possession and "out of an abundance of caution." It was during the search that the documents that could "potentially contain sensitive or classified information interspersed throughout the records" were found.

"Vice President Pence's counsel, however, is unable to provide an exact description of the folders or briefing materials that may contain sensitive or classified information because counsel did not review the contents of the documents once an indicator of potential classification was identified," Jacob wrote in the Jan. 18 letter. "Vice President Pence immediately secured those documents in a locked safe pending further direction on proper handling from the National Archives."

In a [second letter](#) dated Jan. 22, Jacob said the FBI went to Pence's Indiana home the night of Jan. 19 to collect the documents, and the transfer was facilitated by Pence's personal attorney, who was not named.

In addition to the two boxes where the documents were found, two others contained "courtesy copies" of papers from Pence's vice presidency, Jacob told Jay Bosanko, the Archives' chief operating officer.

Pence offered to transfer the four boxes to the Archives for a review to ensure they did not contain original documents that qualified as presidential records and therefore had to be turned over to the agency under federal law, Jacob said.

Jacob arranged to deliver the boxes himself on Monday morning.

A Pence aide told CBS News the boxes, although stored in an insecure area of the home, were taped up and not believed to be opened.

Pence also informed the House Oversight and Accountability Committee on Tuesday of the discovery, according to its chairman, GOP Rep. James Comer.

"He has agreed to fully cooperate with congressional oversight and any questions we have about the matter," Comer said in a statement. "Former Vice President Pence's transparency stands in stark contrast to Biden White House staff who continue to withhold information from Congress and the American people."

Comer's panel is investigating the documents found at Mr. Biden's former office and home.

Rep. Mike Turner, the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, said he plans to request an intelligence review and damage assessment of the records found with Pence to see if there are national security concerns, as he has asked for regarding Mr. Biden's documents.

"It is a serious matter for any government official to mishandle classified documents," he [tweeted](#). In the wake of the discoveries of Mr. Biden's documents and the seizure of dozens of sensitive records from former President Donald Trump's residence in Florida, Pence has repeatedly denied having any documents bearing classification markings from his tenure as vice president in his possession.

In an [interview with CBS News](#) on Jan. 10, Pence said his staff reviewed "all of the materials in our office and in our residence" to make sure there were no sensitive records that left the White House.

"I remain confident that that was done in a thorough and careful way," the former vice president said. Last November, Pence was asked in an [interview with ABC News](#) whether he had taken any sensitive documents.

"Let me ask you, as we sit here in your home office in Indiana, did you take any classified documents with you from the White House?" ABC's David Muir asked Pence.

"I did not," Pence replied.

The discovery follows the matters involving documents marked classified found in both Mr. Biden and Trump's possession, each of which prompted Attorney General Merrick Garland to appoint separate special counsels to take over the Justice Department's investigations.

A former senior adviser to Pence who didn't know about the existence of the documents before CNN reported them said, "Guess it shows if it can happen to an Eagle Scout like Pence, it can happen to anyone."

In Mr. Biden's case, between 25 and 30 documents bearing classification markings dating to his time as a senator and vice president were found by his personal lawyers at his former office at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement and his Wilmington house.

The records were handed over to the Justice Department, and Richard Sauber, Mr. Biden's special counsel, said in a Jan. 12 statement that the documents were "inadvertently misplaced." The FBI [searched](#) the president's Delaware home last Friday and found six items containing classified markings, Mr. Biden's personal attorney Bob Bauer said over the weekend.

In Trump's case, more than 300 documents with classification markings were discovered at his South Florida property, Mar-a-Lago, following [months-long efforts](#) by the Archives to retrieve records taken by the former president from the White House at the end of his presidency.

Of the 300 records, more than 180 documents with classification markings were in boxes retrieved by the Archives from Mar-a-Lago in January 2022. Another 38 documents marked classified were turned over to the Justice Department by Trump's lawyers in June in response to a grand jury subpoena seeking all documents bearing classification markings in Trump's possession.

More than 100 documents marked classified were then found at Mar-a-Lago when the FBI conducted a court-approved search of the premise on Aug. 8.

Trump has claimed that he declassified the records before leaving office, and separately, that he deemed the documents "personal" under the Presidential Records Act and could therefore keep them.

He is under investigation for alleged mishandling of classified documents, as well as possible obstruction of the probe, prosecutors have said.

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HEADLINE	01/24 'Doomsday Clock' closer to apocalypse
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/2023-doomsday-clock-announcement-expect/story?id=96495463
GIST	<p>Scientists revealed on Tuesday that the "Doomsday Clock" has been moved up to 90 seconds before midnight -- the closest humanity has ever been to armageddon.</p> <p>Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the metaphorical clock up 10 seconds from where it had stayed for the past two years, citing the escalation in Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022.</p> <p>"Russia's thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons remind the world that escalation of the conflict by accident, intention or calculation is a terrible risk," said Rachel Bronson, president and CEO of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. "The possibilities that the conflict can spin out of anyone's control remains high."</p>

Bronson noted that U.N. Secretary General António Guterres warned in August that the "world has entered a time of nuclear danger not seen since the height of the Cold War."

"The war's effects also undermine global efforts to combat climate change as countries dependent on Russian oil and gas have expanded investment in natural gas," Bronson said.

The additional concern of Russia's "false accusation" that Ukraine is planning to use radiological dispersal devices, chemical and biological weapons "take on new meaning," she added. "The continuing stream of disinformation about bio weapons laboratories in Ukraine raises concerns that Russia itself maybe thinking of deploying such weapons."

For the past 75 years, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, a nonprofit media organization comprised of world leaders and Nobel laureates, has announced how close it believes the world is to collapse due to nuclear war, climate change and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is a metaphor, a reminder of the perils we must address if we are to survive on the planet," the Bulletin, which created the clock, said on its website, also calling it "a design that warns the public about how close we are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making."

Tuesday's announcement was the first since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, although the panel issued a warning during its last "Doomsday Clock" news conference that Ukraine was a potential flashpoint in an increasingly tense international security environment.

"The challenges outlined by today's announcement by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists could not be more global in nature," Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland and the one-time U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said during Tuesday's news conference. "No one country can tackle them on their own no matter how large their population, how strong their economy or how feared their military."

Launched in 1947, scientists wanted to highlight the possibility of catastrophe to the public as it pertained to the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, according to the Bulletin, saying that "the greatest danger to humanity came from nuclear weapons" at the time.

The clock indicates how much time remains until midnight, theoretical doomsday.

At its launch, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists set the "Doomsday Clock" at seven minutes before midnight because artist Martyl Langsdorf, who sketched the clock that appeared on the June 1947 edition of the magazine, said "it looked good" in her eyes, the organization says.

Before 2020, the closest the hand was set to midnight was two minutes.

Shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine, the Bulletin kept the clock at 100 seconds to midnight, saying that Russian President Vladimir Putin's threats to use nuclear weapons if NATO stepped in to help Ukraine "is what 100 seconds to midnight looks like."

In September, Putin issued a thinly veiled threat that Russia would resort to using nuclear weapons in its fight against Ukraine following several setbacks.

The Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine has come under repeated fire since Russia took it over in March 2022, increasing the risk of nuclear disaster.

Rafael Grossi, director general of the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency, said last week that he is worried the world has become complacent about the potential risks to the plant.

	<p>The furthest the clock has ever been from midnight was 17 minutes in 1991 after then-President George H. W. Bush and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev both announced reductions in the nuclear arsenals of their respective countries.</p> <p>"That reflected a moment when the world was seriously engaging with issues of risk and working together to mitigate it," Bronson said.</p>
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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/24 Pakistan investigates nationwide blackout
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/pakistani-authorities-investigating-if-cyberattack-caused-nationwide-blackout/
GIST	<p>Pakistani authorities are investigating whether a nationwide blackout which left millions of people without power on Monday was caused by a cyberattack.</p> <p>The country's energy minister Khurram Dastgir Khan told journalists during a news conference on Tuesday morning that there was a "remote chance" the incident was caused by hackers.</p> <p>Cyberattacks on energy grids are rare, although several have targeted Ukraine in the context of Russia's attacks against the country since 2014.</p> <p>Outages have become a common occurrence in the South Asian country in recent years, where an ongoing economic crisis and last year's devastating floods have severely impacted the lives of the country's more than 220 million people.</p> <p>Dastgir Khan told reporters in Islamabad on Tuesday that power across Pakistan had been "fully restored" within 24 hours. He added that a committee investigating what had caused the outage had been established by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.</p> <p>In a statement on Twitter, Sharif wrote: "On behalf of my government, I would like to express my sincere regrets for the inconvenience our citizens suffered due to power outage yesterday. On my orders an inquiry is underway to determine reasons of the power failure. Responsibility will be fixed."</p> <p>The investigatory committee's preliminary findings are expected to be completed within the coming days, the energy minister said, but he warned that "routine power outages" could still emerge as all of the country's nuclear and coal power plants were not yet fully back online.</p> <p>The technical root of the problem has not yet been explained in detail. Power generation units had been intentionally and temporarily turned off at night — something Pakistan is doing to save expenditure during the winter — but suffered an error when they were turned on again on Monday morning.</p> <p>"When the systems were turned on at 7:30am one by one, frequency variation was reported in the southern part of the country between Jamshoro and Dadu. There was a fluctuation in voltage and power generating units were shut down one by one due to cascading impact," Dastgir Khan said, as reported by Al Jazeera.</p> <p>All of the country's major cities were impacted by the incident. It follows a similar nationwide loss of power, subsequently attributed to a technical fault rather than a cyberattack, in January 2021.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Ohio town working to restore systems
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/ohio-town-working-to-restore-municipal-court-systems-after-cyberattack/
GIST	An Ohio town is investigating a cyberattack that has brought down the systems used by their court and may have accessed sensitive data.

Circleville Municipal Court told The Record that it recently discovered a cyberattack requiring its IT department to work with outside cybersecurity professionals.

A spokesperson would not confirm whether the incident involved ransomware but the Circleville Municipal Court was added to the leak site of the LockBit ransomware group last week. The group claimed it stole 500 GB of data that included case information and gave the court a deadline of January 24 to pay a ransom.

“We are working around the clock with these experts to ensure that our systems are restored and back up and running as soon as possible. As part of our investigation, we are assessing the extent of any compromise of information as a result of this incident,” a court spokesperson said.

“We are taking this matter very seriously and continue to take significant measures to protect the information entrusted to us.”

The town’s mayor and the Ohio governor’s office did not respond to requests for comment. Circleville has about 14,000 residents.

The attack comes just weeks after another town in Ohio, Mount Vernon, said its police department, municipal court and other government offices were affected by a [ransomware attack that started on December 19](#).

Ohio has faced several other ransomware attacks over the last two years, including ones [affecting dozens of local schools](#) and others [targeted at hospitals](#).

Ransomware groups have [made a point](#) of going after poorly-resourced local governments across the United States in 2022, targeting small governments in [New Jersey](#), [Colorado](#), [Oregon](#), [New York](#) and several other states.

The LockBit ransomware gang [has quickly become](#) the most prolific ransomware gang operating, launching hundreds of attacks last year on government agencies, companies and organizations around the world.

The group has caused particular outrage in recent weeks with attacks on [Canadian children's hospital](#), one of the [biggest ports in Europe](#) and a [British postage and courier company](#).

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HEADLINE	01/24 DuoLingo investigates post on dark web
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/duolingo-investigating-dark-web-post-offering-data-from-2-6-million-accounts/
GIST	<p>Language learning platform DuoLingo said it is investigating a post on a hacking forum offering information on 2.6 million customer accounts for \$1,500.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the company said they are aware of the post, which was created on Tuesday morning and offers emails, phone numbers, courses taken and other information on how customers use the platform.</p> <p>“These records were obtained by data scraping public profile information,” a spokesperson said.</p> <p>“No data breach or hack has occurred. We take data privacy and security seriously and are continuing to investigate this matter to determine if there’s any further action needed to protect our learners.”</p> <p>In the post, the hacker said they obtained the information from scraping an exposed application programming interface (API) and provided a sample of data from 1,000 accounts.</p>

The scraping of social media sites and platforms like DuoLingo is a widespread problem affecting many of the biggest tech companies currently operating.

There are now a number of tools that allow people to scrape APIs and extract troves of data from websites.

Sometimes the information is public but in many cases it is exposed through links to other sites.

[Two weeks ago](#), Meta filed legal action against a surveillance service which it accused of creating fake accounts on Instagram and Facebook for the purpose of scraping user data.

In October 2021, Facebook also [sued a Ukrainian man](#) who scraped the data of more than 178 million Facebook users between January 2018 to September 2019.

Facebook said the man abused its contacts import feature in its Messenger mobile app and [follow-up research showed](#) that several other social networks like Signal and Telegram were vulnerable to scraping attacks via contacts importing features.

In April 2021, the [phone numbers of 533 million Facebook users](#) were shared on a hacking forum after a hacker said they collected them by scraping Facebook.

That same year, a hacker offered data from [more than 700 million LinkedIn users](#).

Human Security [said in 2022](#) that web scraping increased 240% year-over-year, mostly because of the use of bots by cybercriminals.

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HEADLINE	01/25 NKorea crypto hackers expand target list
SOURCE	https://cyberscoop.com/north-korean-cryptocurrency-hackers-education-government/
GIST	<p>North Korean hackers known for cryptocurrency heists are expanding their targets to include education, government and healthcare, according to researchers tracking the group. The activity could be a sign that the group, which is suspected in two high-profile cryptocurrency hacks in 2022, may have even bigger plans for 2023.</p> <p>Researchers at the cybersecurity firm Proofpoint observed in early December a massive wave of phishing emails from a cluster of North Korea-related hacking activity linked to TA444, the firm's name for the group. The latest campaign, which blasted more emails than researchers attributed to that group in all of 2022, tried to entice users to click a URL that redirected to a credential harvesting page.</p> <p>Proofpoint could not disclose the specifics about targets for confidentiality reasons, but most related to finance in some way. Documents attached in the emails included titles like "Profit and Loss," "Invoice and statement receipts" and "Salary adjustments." The malicious emails also included lures mentioning "analyses of cryptocurrency blockchains, job opportunities at prestigious firms, or salary adjustments" according to the report. To help avoid phishing detection tools, TA444 uses email marketing tools to engage with targets.</p> <p>Researchers say that the campaign is unusual for a few reasons. Technically, it deviates from the group's previous activity in that the hackers focused on trying to steal the target's login and passwords rather than a direct deployment of malware.</p> <p>The bigger question is why a group known to be financially motivated would target government and education sectors alongside the far more lucrative financial sector. TA444, like other clusters of activity associated with the North Korean government, is almost exclusively financially motivated. In more recent years, North Korean hackers have honed in especially on the cryptocurrency industry.</p>

TA444 has overlapped with Lazarus, a group of North Korean hackers to which the FBI attributed a [record \\$600 million dollar cryptocurrency attack on Ronin Bridge](#), the infrastructure that connected the Axie Infinity video game with the Ethereum blockchain. The FBI on Monday attributed [a separate \\$100 million hack of the Harmony Bridge](#) to the group after the hackers recently tried to launder \$60 million worth of currency stolen in the heist.

The December campaign comes on the heels of a noticeable shift in delivery tactics researchers began to notice in the fall, demonstrating that the group might be taking on more of a “start-up” mentality, Proofpoint researchers wrote.

“We can’t always derive the motive behind shifts in strategy. But we may have the answer later, when we see more of these attacks,” said Alexis Dorais-Joncas, senior manager of threat research at Proofpoint. “It might be a one-off. It might be a test to see how much success they could have hacking other types of organizations. But right now, it’s not really clear to us why they are actually doing that.”

Researchers at Kaspersky in December also noted [North Korean hackers pivoting](#) malware delivery methods. They found that hackers had created numerous fake domains, most of them imitating Japanese venture capital firms. Domains flagged by Proofpoint also included attempts to spoof Japanese financial institutions.

Proofpoint could not rule out that another actor had compromised TA444’s server or that the group was potentially moonlighting for other purposes, which could signal more differentiation in targets going forward.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Emotet malware new evasion techniques
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/emotet-malware-makes-comeback-with-new.html
GIST	<p>The Emotet malware operation has continued to refine its tactics in an effort to fly under the radar, while also acting as a conduit for other dangerous malware such as Bumblebee and IcedID.</p> <p>Emotet, which officially reemerged in late 2021 following a coordinated takedown of its infrastructure by authorities earlier that year, has continued to be a persistent threat that's distributed via phishing emails.</p> <p>Attributed to a cybercrime group tracked as TA542 (aka Gold Crestwood or Mummy Spider), the virus has evolved from a banking trojan to a malware distributor since its first appearance in 2014.</p> <p>The malware-as-a-service (MaaS) is also modular, capable of deploying an array of proprietary and freeware components that can exfiltrate sensitive information from compromised machines and carry out other post-exploitation activities.</p> <p>Two latest additions to Emotet's module arsenal comprise an SMB spreader that's designed to facilitate lateral movement using a list of hard-coded usernames and passwords, and a credit card stealer that targets the Chrome web browser.</p> <p>Recent campaigns involving the botnet have leveraged generic lures with weaponized attachments to initiate the attack chain. But with macros becoming an obsolete method of payload distribution and initial infection, the attacks have latched on to other approaches to sneak Emotet past malware detection tools.</p> <p>"With the newest wave of Emotet spam emails, the attached .XLS files have a new method for tricking users into allowing macros to download the dropper," BlackBerry disclosed in a report published last week. "In addition to this, new Emotet variants have now moved from 32bit to 64bit, as another method for evading detection."</p>

Return to Top	<p>The method involves instructing victims to move the decoy Microsoft Excel files to the default Office Templates folder in Windows, a location trusted by the operating system, to execute malicious macros embedded within the documents to deliver Emotet.</p> <p>Put differently, the social engineering twist makes it possible to bypass Mark of the Web (MotW) protections, which load the Office files downloaded from the internet in Protected View, a read-only mode with macros and other content disabled.</p> <p>The development points to Emotet's steady attempts to retool itself and propagate other malware, such as Bumblebee and IcedID.</p> <p>"With its steady evolution over the last eight-plus years, Emotet has continued to become more sophisticated in terms of evasion tactics; has added additional modules in an effort to further propagate itself, and is now spreading malware via phishing campaigns," the Canadian cybersecurity firm said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Illinois hospital suspends operations
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/citing-cyberattack-covid-19-impacts-illinois-hospital-suspends-operations
GIST	<p>St. Margaret's Health has temporarily suspended operations at its hospital in Peru, Illinois, as its leadership could not "find nor financially support" a new provider for its emergency room department.</p> <p>A cyberattack on St. Margaret's Health's Spring Valley Hospital and impacts of COVID-19 are cited as driving forces behind the decision.</p> <p>The Spring Valley branch was struck by a cyberattack on Feb 22, 2021, prompting the launch of electronic health record downtime procedures and a complete enterprise network shutdown that lasted for several weeks. All web-based operating systems, such as email and the patient portal, were also brought offline.</p> <p>Patient care continued without interruption, due to its previously implemented and practiced downtime procedures. However, the hospital was forced to divert its diagnostic imaging procedures to another hospital branch to ensure accuracy of scans. According to the letter sent to employees, these outages contributed to the hospital's ongoing financial constraints.</p> <p>The letter cites a number of factors, including the cyberattack that led to the hospital being unable to "bill nor get paid, in a timely manner, for the services provided during the outage. The hospital was also facing staffing shortages that required the use of "temporary agencies to fill positions at a significantly higher pay rate."</p> <p>"And, like you, we have been faced with rising costs for goods," the health system CEO and board chair wrote. "This all came at great financial cost. It's obvious to the Board and Administration that action is needed now." Further, "the current provider of physicians terminated their contract effective at that time."</p> <p>The hospital has also struggled to "attract enough staff to continue to operate both hospitals." As a result of these compounding factors, the hospital will no longer have ER physician coverage at its SMH-Peru branch beginning on Jan. 28 as hospitals aren't legally allowed to operate without a fully staffed emergency room.</p> <p>The letter notes that hospital leadership will continue its ongoing efforts to convert the Peru branch to a Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) by working with local legislators to "expedite adoption of the REH regulations that were just issued by Centers for Medicare Services (CMS)."</p> <p>Although temporary, the situation is a worst-case scenario stakeholders have long suspected could occur when constrained budgets meet the staggering recovery costs and lost revenue brought on in the wake of a cyberattack.</p>

	<p>St. Margaret's Health situation is a rare occurrence, with just two reported closures in 2019. Brookside ENT and Hearing Center in Michigan and California-based Wood Ranch Medical permanently closed after hackers encrypted and either damaged or deleted the data. Rather than pay the ransom or costs to rebuild, the providers opted to shutter their practices.</p> <p>Several estimates based on health systems that provided financial details after an incident detail just how much a cyberattack with related-outages cost provider organizations. For example, the outages at Universal Health Services and Vermont Health lasted about one month, and cost \$67 million and \$63 million ,respectively.</p> <p>The July IBM Cost of a Data Breach report found breaches are the costliest in healthcare, at an average of \$10 million each. These costs are tied to recovery, lost revenue, and the highly regulated nature of the sector overall.</p> <p>While St. Margaret Health's hospital closure appears temporary, it should serve as another warning to provider organizations to practice remediation plans and ensure business continuity plans include processes for maintaining critical services in the event of a cyber-related outage.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Microsoft experiences service outage
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/micorosft-down-xbox-azure-ms365-teams/
GIST	<p>Is Microsoft down at your end? You are not alone; many of the Microsoft services are down in many parts of the world.</p> <p>Microsoft is experiencing a service outage. Its services, including Xbox Live, Minecraft, Microsoft Teams, Outlook, Azure, LinkedIn, and Microsoft 365, are down and unavailable for users around the world.</p> <p>A look at Downdetector, a platform that tracks online service disruptions, shows users have been complaining about connectivity issues. On the other hand, Microsoft has acknowledged the issue and tweeted that "We're investigating issues impacting multiple Microsoft 365 services."</p> <p>It is yet unclear whether these services are down due to a cyberattack or a result of a technical glitch. However, in a tweet update, Microsoft claimed to have identified "a potential networking issue" that the company believes is "causing impact."</p> <p>It is worth noting that Microsoft Azure has over 700 million active users, with 85% of the Fortune 500 companies using Microsoft Cloud. LinkedIn, which Microsoft bought in 2016, has over 900 million users across the globe. Microsoft Teams, a business communication platform, is home to over 270 million active users, while Xbox has almost 100 million users.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 FBI confirms NKorea hackers stole \$100M
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-north-korean-hackers-stole-100-million-in-harmony-crypto-hack/
GIST	<p>The FBI has confirmed that the North Korean state-sponsored 'Lazarus' and APT38 hacking groups were behind the theft of \$100 million worth of Ethereum stolen from Harmony Horizon in June 2022</p> <p>Harmony Horizon is a cross-chain bridge for Ethereum that suffered a breach in June 2022, allowing hackers to assume control of a MultiSigWallet contract and use it to transfer large amounts of tokens to their addresses.</p> <p>For more details on the technical aspect of the attack, Certik released a report describing the attack flow and the steps the threat actors took to siphon millions.</p>

Yesterday, the FBI confirmed that two North Korean hacking groups, Lazarus and [APT38](#), were behind the attack.

“Through our investigation, we were able to confirm that the Lazarus Group and APT38, cyber actors associated with the DPRK, are responsible for the theft of \$100 million of virtual currency from Harmony’s Horizon bridge, reported on June 24, 2022.” - [FBI](#).

The Lazarus and APT38 hacking groups are linked to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and have a history of stealing cryptocurrency assets on behalf of the government.

The FBI states that North Korean hacking groups steal and launder virtual currency to support their country's ballistic missile and weapons of mass destruction programs.

In this case, the FBI managed to associate Lazarus with the heist thanks to one of the threat group's laundering efforts last week.

On January 13th, the hackers [attempted to move 41,000 ETH](#) (\$63.5 million) through Railgun before depositing the funds to many addresses in three cryptocurrency exchanges.

At least [350](#) of these addresses have been identified to be under the direct control of the Lazarus group. The hackers converted some of these moved funds to Bitcoin, and the FBI seized an undefined portion by working closely with virtual asset service providers.

The FBI states the remaining converted funds are now stored in the following Bitcoin addresses.

- 1BK769SseNefb6fe9QuFEi8W4KGbtP8gi3
- 15FcqYRbwh2JsRUyBjvZ4jJ2XAD3pycGch
- 1HwSof6jnbMFpfrRRa2jvydYdopkkGB4Sn
- 15emeZ7buVegqhYh9PekH7cwFEJcCeVNpS
- 3MSbCJCYtx5sj1nkzD4AMEhhvviXBc8XJ
- 17Z79rZpkk8kUiJseg5aELwYKaoLnrMUn
- bc1qp2vvntdedxw4xwtyd4y3gc2t9ufk6pwz2ga4ge
- 3P9WebHkiDxCi8LDXiRQp8atNEagcQeRA3
- 37fnBxofDeph2fpBZxZKypNkwdXAt9nT6F
- 185NxfAmKZrdwn9rVga3kqbvDP4FkbTNw
- 12283Cq1pJ3f1gXwqi6K3bRf5LZb8Bkm6g

[Binance announced](#) at the time that, together with Huobi, they managed to intercept 124 BTC stolen from Harmony Horizon, which was worth approximately \$2.5 million.

Moreover, all accounts used in the laundering actions were frozen.

Past Lazarus attacks

North Korean hackers have a long history of targeting cryptocurrency companies to steal assets to fund their country's initiatives.

Lazarus began targeting cryptocurrency users by spreading [trojanized cryptocurrency wallets](#) and [trading apps](#) to steal victims' wallets.

In April 2022, the U.S. Treasury and the FBI [linked the Lazarus group](#) to [the theft of over \\$617 million](#) worth of Ethereum and USDC tokens from the blockchain-based game Axie Infinity.

It was later revealed that the hackers conducted this attack after sending a [malicious laced PDF file](#) containing a lucrative job offer to one of the blockchain's engineers.

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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/75k-wordpress-sites-impacted-by-critical-online-course-plugin-flaws/
GIST	<p>The WordPress online course plugin 'LearnPress' was vulnerable to multiple critical-severity flaws, including pre-auth SQL injection and local file inclusion.</p> <p>LearnPress is a learning management system (LMS) plugin that allows WordPress websites to easily create and sell online courses, lessons, and quizzes, providing visitors with a friendly interface while requiring no coding knowledge from the website developer.</p> <p>The vulnerabilities in the plugin, used in over 100,000 active sites, were discovered by PatchStack between November 30 and December 2, 2022, and reported to the software vendor.</p> <p>The issues were fixed on December 20, 2022, with the release of LearnPress version 4.2.0. However, according to WordPress.org stats, only about 25% have applied the update.</p> <p>This means that roughly 75,000 websites could be using a vulnerable version of LearnPress, exposing themselves to severe security flaws, the exploitation of which can have serious repercussions.</p> <p>Vulnerability details</p> <p>The first vulnerability discovered by PatchStack is CVE-2022-47615, an unauthenticated local file inclusion (LFI) flaw that allows attackers to display the contents of local files stored on the web server.</p> <p>This could expose credentials, authorization tokens, and API keys, leading to further compromise.</p> <p>The vulnerability is found in a piece of code that handles API requests for the website, located in the "list_courses" function, which does not validate certain variables (\$template_pagination_path, \$template_path, and \$template_path_item) properly.</p> <p>An attacker could potentially exploit CVE-2022-47615 by sending a specially crafted API request and using malicious values for the three variables.</p> <p>The second critical flaw is CVE-2022-45808, an unauthenticated SQL injection potentially leading to sensitive information disclosure, data modification, and arbitrary code execution.</p> <p>This vulnerability lies in a function that handles SQL queries for the website, which does not correctly sanitize and validate the "\$filter" variable in the query parameters, allowing an attacker to insert malicious code in it.</p> <p>The third flaw impacting older LearnPress versions is CVE-2022-45820, an authenticated SQL injection flaw in two shortcodes of the plugin ("learn_press_recent_courses" and "learn_press_featured_courses") failing to properly validate and sanitize the input of the "\$args" variable.</p> <p>PatchStack provided a proof-of-concept exploit showing how a 'Contributor' user could trigger the SQL injection using a specially crafted shortcode on a drafted post.</p> <p>This vulnerability needs to be performed by a user with the ability to edit or create a new blog post, limiting the risk of the flaw.</p> <p>The vendor fixed the above issues by introducing an allowlist and sanitization of the vulnerable variables or removing the ability to include templates in user input.</p> <p>Website owners relying on LearnPress are advised to either upgrade to version 4.2.0 or disable the plugin until they can apply the available security update.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Riot Games ransom demand; refuses to pay
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/riot-games-receives-ransom-demand-from-hackers-refuses-to-pay/
GIST	<p>Riot Games says it will not pay a \$10 million ransom demanded by attackers who stole League of Legends source code in last week's security breach.</p> <p>"Today, we received a ransom email. Needless to say, we won't pay," the video game publisher and developer said on Tuesday.</p> <p>"While this attack disrupted our build environment and could cause issues in the future, most importantly we remain confident that no player data or player personal information was compromised."</p> <p>While inside Riot Games' systems, the threat actors stole source code for the League of Legends (LoL) multiplayer online battle arena, the Teamfight Tactics (TFT) auto battler game, and a legacy anti-cheat platform.</p> <p>The LoL and TFT teams are looking into how cheat developers could use the stolen data to create new tools and analyzing if any fixes are needed to fend off such malicious efforts.</p> <p>The game source code stolen during the security breach also contains some features still waiting to be released, which might not reach the release phase, according to the game developer.</p> <p>"While we hope some of these game modes and other changes eventually make it out to players, most of this content is in prototype and there's no guarantee it will ever be released," Riot Games said.</p> <p>Riot Games said it's working with law enforcement and external consultants to investigate the attack and that a full report will be released detailing how its development environment was breached and what measures were taken to prevent this from happening again.</p> <p>Last week, when the breach was disclosed, the game publisher also said that the incident directly impacted its teams' ability to publish game patches, with some of them likely to be delayed as a result.</p> <p>"While our teams are working hard on a fix, we expect this to impact our upcoming patch cadence across multiple games," Riot Games said.</p> <p>Andrei van Roon, the head of League Studio, also chimed in and said that nothing on the release plan for LoL's Patch 13.2 would be canceled but that they "might just have to move things that can't be hotfixed (e.g. art changes) to a later date instead."</p> <p>\$10 million ransom</p> <p>According to a report from Motherboard, who obtained the ransom note sent to Riot Games, the hackers asked for \$10 million not to leak the stolen source code and delete it from their servers.</p> <p>"We have obtained your valuable data, including the precious anti-cheat source code and the entire game code for League of Legends and its tools, as well as Packman, your usermode anti-cheat," the ransom note reads.</p> <p>"We understand the significance of these artifacts and the impact their release to the public would have on your major titles, Valorant and League of Legends. In light of this, we are making a small request for an exchange of \$10,000,000.</p> <p>"In return, we will immediately remove all source code from our servers and guarantee that the files will never be released to the public. We will also provide insight into how the breach occurred and offer advice on preventing future breaches."</p> <p>Several game publishers hacked in recent months</p>

	<p>The Riot Games breach follows the hack of another major video game publisher, 2K Games, which said in September 2022 that attackers breached its help desk and infected some customers with malware. In October 2022, 2K warned its users that some of their information was stolen and put up for sale online. The same month, Rockstar Games was also breached, with the attacker leaking videos of the unreleased Grand Theft Auto VI game and source code files for GTA V and GTA VI.</p> <p>The hacker behind the Rockstar Games incident has also claimed a cyberattack on Uber, which attributed their breach to the Lapsus\$ extortion group.</p> <p>Lapsus\$ is known for hacking into the network of a series of high-profile companies, including Microsoft, Nvidia, T-Mobile, Samsung, Uber, Vodafone, Ubisoft, Okta, and e-commerce giant Mercado Libre.</p> <p>This cybercrime group also leaked source code and proprietary data stolen from victims' networks, which led to massive data breaches and leaks.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 DragonSpark malware: Frankenstein-style
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/dragonspark-malware-east-asian-cyberattackers-oss-frankenstein
GIST	<p>We imagine that the world's most successful hackers write their own dangerous code and invest heavily in the technologies they use to breach their targets. In recent months, however, a new cluster of attacks succeeded with just the opposite approach.</p> <p>According to a report out Jan. 24 from SentinelOne, a threat actor compromised a number of organizations across China and Taiwan by creating a Frankenstein's monster-style composite of preexisting open source components. Among them: multiple tools for escalating user privileges in Windows machines, and for establishing persistence and allowing remote code execution.</p> <p>In addition to adopting other hackers' code, the attackers freely adopted other organizations' infrastructure, too. In staging their malware, the hackers puppeteered servers located in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, many of which were hosted by perfectly ordinary businesses, including an art gallery, a retailer for baby products, and companies in the gaming and gambling industries.</p> <p>Researchers from SentinelOne named the campaign "DragonSpark" — a portmanteau referencing the attackers' Chinese-language links, and "SparkRAT," an open source remote access Trojan (RAT) never seen in the wild until now.</p> <p>An Open Source Party</p> <p>To gain initial access to their targets, the DragonSpark attackers sought out Internet-exposed Web servers and MySQL database servers. Then, with a foot in the door, they began deploying open source malware.</p> <p>"Open source tools and existing infrastructure are very practical to threat actors," Aleksandar Milenkoski, senior threat researcher at SentinelOne, tells Dark Reading. This is especially true of "actors involved in cybercrime activities without many resources and in-depth technical readiness to develop their own tool set and setup an intricate infrastructure, but aiming for large-scale, opportunistic attacks at the same time."</p> <p>The DragonSpark attackers carried out their opportunistic attacks with programs like SharpToken and BadPotato, which enable the execution of commands at the level of the Windows operating system. SharpToken also provides visibility to user and process information; it allows a user to freely add, delete, or modify passwords of system users. BadPotato, the researchers noted, had been previously used by other Chinese threat actors in an espionage campaign.</p> <p>Next in the arsenal was GotoHTTP, which facilitates persistence, file transfer, and remote screen viewing. But the most notable malware of all was SparkRAT — "a very recent development on the threat</p>

landscape," Milenkoski noted. DragonSpark represents "the first concrete observation of threat actors using SparkRAT as part of larger campaigns."

Released in its current version on Nov. 1, 2022, SparkRAT is a jack of all trades. It's compatible with not only Windows but also Linux and macOS systems. Its most notable features are as follows, as the researchers outlined:

- "Command execution: including execution of arbitrary Windows system and PowerShell commands;
- System manipulation: including system shutdown, restart, hibernation, and suspension;
- File and process manipulation: including process termination as well as file upload, download, and deletion; and
- Information theft: including exfiltration of platform information (CPU, network, memory, disk, and system uptime information), screenshot theft, and process and file enumeration."

SparkRAT, SharpToken, Bad Potato, and GotoHTTP are all freely available to download online. As open-source tools, their use also makes attribution more difficult.

Links to China

All of the targets of DragonSpark were organizations based in East Asia. Many of them "have a large customer base," Milenkoski observes, "leading to the belief that the threat actors may be targeting customer data." Whether the motive was cybercrime or espionage was not determined.

Though unable to attribute anyone specific, the researchers considered it "highly likely" that the DragonSpark attackers were Chinese speakers. That is, in part, explained by the fact that most of their infrastructure and targets were located in East Asia. Additionally, the Web shell they used to deploy their malware — a [well-known tool called China Chopper](#) — and all of the open source tools described above were originally developed by Chinese-speaking developers and vendors.

This is consistent with recent activity in the world of Chinese threat actors. An [alert](#) published last summer by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) highlighted how state-sponsored APTs from the People's Republic "often mix their customized toolset with publicly available tools."

All signs point to more of these kinds of attacks going forward. SparkRAT in particular, though nascent to the scene, "is regularly updated with new features," the SentinelOne researchers noted, adding that "the RAT will remain attractive to cybercriminals and other threat actors in the future."

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HEADLINE	01/24 World's biggest face recognition dealer
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/china-is-the-worlds-biggest-face-recognition-dealer/
GIST	<p>EARLY LAST YEAR, the government of Bangladesh began weighing an offer from an unnamed Chinese company to build a smart city on the Bay of Bengal with infrastructure enhanced by artificial intelligence. Construction of the high-tech metropolis has yet to begin, but if it proceeds it may include face recognition software that can use public cameras to identify missing persons or track criminals in a crowd—capabilities already standard in many Chinese cities.</p> <p>The project is among those that make China the world leader in exporting face recognition, according to a study by academics at Harvard and MIT published last week by the Brookings Institution, a prominent think tank.</p> <p>The report finds that Chinese companies lead the world in exporting face recognition, accounting for 201 export deals involving the technology, followed by US firms with 128 deals. China also has a lead in AI generally, with 250 out of a total of 1,636 export deals involving some form of AI to 136 importing countries. The second biggest exporter was the US, with 215 AI deals.</p> <p>The report argues that these exports may enable other governments to perform more surveillance, potentially harming citizens' human rights. "The fact that China is exporting to these countries may kind</p>

of flip them to become more autocratic, when in fact they could become more democratic,” says [Martin Beraja](#), an economist at MIT involved in the study whose work focuses on the relationship between new technologies like AI, government policies, and macroeconomics.

Face recognition technology has numerous practical applications, including unlocking smartphones, providing authentication in apps, and finding friends in social media posts. The MIT-Harvard researchers focused on deals involving so-called smart city technology, where face recognition is often deployed to enhance video surveillance. The research used information on global surveillance projects from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and data scraped from Chinese AI companies.

In recent years US lawmakers and presidents have expressed concern that China is gaining an edge over the US in AI technology. The report seems to offer hard evidence of one area where that shift has already occurred.

“It bolsters the case for why we need to be setting parameters around this type of technology,” says [Alexandra Seymour](#), an associate fellow at the Center for New American Security who studies the policy implications of AI.

There is growing bipartisan interest in the US in restricting Chinese technology worldwide. Under president Trump, the US government [imposed rules designed to restrict the use of Huawei’s 5G technology](#) in the US and elsewhere and [took aim at China’s AI firms with a chip embargo](#). The Biden administration levied a [more sweeping chip blockade](#) that prevents Chinese companies accessing cutting edge chips or semiconductor manufacturing technology, and has [placed sanctions](#) on Chinese providers of face recognition used to monitor Uyghur Muslims.

Further efforts to limit the export of face recognition from China could perhaps take the form of sanctions on countries that import the technology, Seymour says. But she adds that the US also needs to set an example to the rest of the world in terms of regulating the use of facial recognition.

The fact that the US is the world’s second largest exporter of face recognition technology risks undermining the idea—promoted by the US government—that American technology naturally embodies values of freedom and democracy.

Use of facial recognition is [rising among US police departments](#), and while [some cities have placed restrictions](#) on the use of the technology, there are [no national standards](#) restricting or limiting its use. Some US companies, such as [Clearview AI](#), have developed and are exporting face recognition tools that can connect a surveillance camera image of a person to their online identities, a use case that civil liberties groups argue [invades citizen’s privacy without legal justification](#).

Seymour says the best way for the US to counter China’s success in exporting face recognition may be to regulate its use at home and to then offer alternatives to Chinese technology abroad. “Having a conversation around values will help to shape some of the limitations that need to be set on these technologies,” she says. But the prospects of the US Congress agreeing on meaningful limits to the technology look slim.

Chinese companies have come to dominate [face recognition technology](#) partly because of ties to government entities that can provide huge quantities of photos as well as significant funding for the technology’s development. In a paper published in November 2021, Beraja and his coauthors argued that innovation in the development of face recognition AI [can flourish in autocracies](#) because of close alignment between the technology and government goals.

Controlling the spread of unsavory uses of face recognition could be difficult, because the same technology can have many more benign uses.

And [David Yang](#), one of Beraja’s coauthors and an economist at Harvard University, says recent US moves to contain Chinese technology have focused more on preventing development of new capabilities,

	<p>not limiting the transfer of existing ones. “China has already developed a comprehensive suite of surveillance AI tech that it can sell,” he says. “The recent restrictions do nothing to change that.”</p> <p>Seymour of the Center for New American Security says other emerging areas of AI could also be set to develop into powerful new surveillance tools whose proliferation should be carefully monitored.</p> <p>Face recognition was one of the first practical uses for AI to appear after vastly improved image processing algorithms using artificial neural networks surfaced in the early 2010s. She suggests the large language models that have caused excitement around clever conversational tools such as ChatGPT could follow a similar path, for example by being adapted into more effective ways to censor web content or analyze communications.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 FCC broadband service maps disputed
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2023/01/fcc-broadband-service-maps-disputed-thousands-wa-locations
GIST	<p>Maureen Kwolek has talked with many of her Port Gamble Bay neighbors about their crappy internet. It’s a common topic of conversation in her Kitsap Peninsula town.</p> <p>“Service really varies – between so-so and bad,” wrote Kwolek, who compared her CenturyLink copper wire service to the old days of dial-up.</p> <p>Kwolek was one of 34 Crosscut readers who responded to a recent story about the new national broadband map produced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Like many who wrote in, she felt the map overstated the paltry internet options in her community.</p> <p>That’s a sentiment she shares with at least 1 million Americans, according to early results of an effort to shore up the country’s spotty data on connectivity. In Washington state, county officials say tens of thousands of households in the Puget Sound area alone appear wrongly designated as fully served by broadband services.</p> <p>In 2020, Congress tasked the FCC with updating its national internet connectivity data, which for decades has been regarded as vastly understating the number of Americans without internet access. (The FCC says 14.5 million Americans remain offline; an alternative tally by Microsoft argues the number is as high as 120 million.)</p> <p>Many had hoped that process would be further along by this year, as it will shape how a \$42 billion infrastructure push – the largest single investment in the nation’s broadband network – gets distributed among states this July.</p> <p>The FCC released updated maps, largely based on service data self-reported by telecom companies, on Nov. 18. But a Jan. 13 deadline to object left less than two months (over the holiday season) for states, local governments and individuals to submit challenges to the service levels outlined for their areas.</p> <p>Asked in December if the short deadline would result in less accurate data, FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel replied that the Jan. 13 deadline was set by a different agency, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).</p> <p>“That’s not a date that’s in our rules in any way, shape, and form,” Rosenworcel said. “It’s just a target that was set by my colleagues at the NTIA to try to ensure that as many challenges get resolved as possible before our production of the next map.”</p> <p>In their own statement, the NTIA did not directly address concerns about map accuracy, instead arguing that pushing back the deadline would further delay the much-needed resources. The NTIA noted that more than 1 million challenges had already been submitted to the FCC.</p>

“Unfortunately, a delay in the timeline would mean a delay in providing funding to communities who desperately need it, and it will not address many of the process concerns we have heard.”

The FCC has had more than two years to sharpen its maps since Congress passed the [Broadband Data Act](#), which required it to collect more granular data and allow for input from web users. Historically, the agency’s reliance on companies to self-report what census blocks they serve with minimal vetting has produced highly flawed maps, according to critics.

As part of this process, Washington officials have identified thousands of locations with incorrect internet service information.

Pierce County challenged some 10,000 locations on the FCC’s map, where they believe companies are wrongly claiming to provide internet service. In 2020, the county hired a consultant to [gather data on unserved parts of the county](#) as part of a plan to create [five “broadband incentive districts”](#) on the county’s unincorporated periphery. That work found at least 14,000 unserved homes, according to Jon Baker, project manager for Pierce County’s broadband initiatives.

The FCC also missed about 40% of the 5,220 unserved homes identified by King County in a [2020 broadband access study](#), according to the office of county council member Sarah Perry. That data was submitted to the FCC in early January, but was rejected one week later, according to Tommy Lee, a manager for King County’s IT department.

Lee wrote in an email that the FCC’s response took issue with King County’s methodology, arguing it “does not connect how the study’s information correlates to the speeds offered by the indicated companies at the challenged locations.”

And in Snohomish County, officials said an additional 7,400 households are missing from the map entirely. Those numbers come from comparing county assessor, planning and 911 data with the FCC’s map data, according to Jason Biermann, senior policy advisor to the Snohomish County Executive’s Office. It’s unclear if those homes are served or not.

“Right now, we believe Snohomish County’s broadband access is likely significantly overrepresented, particularly in rural areas,” Biermann wrote in an email.

The county encouraged residents to file challenges with the FCC, but did not submit any official challenge by the Jan. 13 deadline. Biermann said the FCC did not provide enough time for that.

“The FCC’s compressed timeline, coupled with the fact that the challenge period took place during the holidays and — occasionally — during severe winter weather, meant that more comprehensive outreach wasn’t feasible,” he wrote.

(Snohomish County does plan to challenge, Biermann added, once they can verify how many of those homes are unserved.)

Washington’s state broadband office [asked residents to file their own challenges](#), although it’s not clear what effect that had. (The office’s director, Mark Vasconi, did not make himself available for comment last week.) Web users could also submit challenges through a portal hosted by Washington State University Extension. That effort yielded just 40 responses, according to Dustin Loup, Broadband and Digital Equity project director.

Loup, who also heads the National Broadband Mapping Coalition, was skeptical that a quick fix to the map’s long-standing accuracy issues would be possible on such a short timeframe. The FCC’s process is not particularly user-friendly and places a disproportionate burden on individuals with the least resources to fix the problem, he said.

	<p>“There’s this obvious oxymoron here with requiring people who don’t have the internet to challenge [companies] who are saying that they provide that internet to them,” Loup said. “Even in the best scenario, it’s stacked against the unserved individuals.”</p> <p>The impact of service challenges or updated data on federal funding may not be known until July, when final allocations go out to states. But the FCC is continuing to accept challenges, and Loup said individuals should continue to file them, because they may affect what areas are eligible to receive money.</p> <p>“Last week’s deadline affected the size of the pool,” Loup said, “not necessarily who gets to swim in it.”</p> <p>A number of Crosscut readers from across the state shared their ongoing frustrations with limited or nonexistent internet access. One reader in Brinnon, a tiny village along the Olympic Peninsula, wrote in to say his home does not appear on the map at all.</p> <p>“What I see is lots of green dots in the neighborhood, which are my neighbors, but none at my geo-location or address,” the Brinnon reader wrote. “Our neighborhood is sparse enough that I know I am missing.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 DOJ files antitrust lawsuit against Google
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/24/justice-department-launches-antitrust-lawsuit-goog/
GIST	<p>The Justice Department filed an antitrust lawsuit against Google on Tuesday that accuses the internet search giant of unlawfully bullying competitors that challenge its dominance in the digital advertising marketplace.</p> <p>The lawsuit, which has the potential to break up Google’s massive advertising business, was joined by eight states including California, New York, Colorado and Virginia.</p> <p>“One industry behemoth, Google, has corrupted legitimate competition in the ad tech industry by engaging in a systematic campaign to seize control of the wide swath of high-tech tools used by publishers, advertisers and brokers, to facilitate digital advertising,” the lawsuit says. “Having inserted itself into all aspects of the digital advertising marketplace, Google has used anticompetitive, exclusionary and unlawful means to eliminate or severely diminish any threat to its dominance over digital advertising technologies.”</p> <p>The Justice Department said Google’s anticompetitive conduct included acquiring competitors, forcing website publishers to use Google tools, and distorting and manipulating advertising auctions. The department accused Google of controlling nearly all tools used by web publishers to sell ads and controlling advertiser tools used to buy advertising inventory.</p> <p>Google said the lawsuit is an attempt by the Justice Department to “pick winners and losers in the highly competitive advertising technology sector.”</p> <p>“DOJ is doubling down on a flawed argument that would slow innovation, raise advertising fees, and make it harder for thousands of small businesses and publishers to grow,” the company said in a statement.</p> <p>The Justice Department rejected Google’s response and said its lawsuit was not a rehash of old arguments or similar lawsuits filed by other states.</p> <p>“We don’t pick winners or losers, we pick those who violate the antitrust laws,” Attorney General Merrick Garland said. “Those are the people we sued. In this case, we sued Google because we believe it violated the antitrust laws.”</p> <p>Google’s supporters said the lawsuit is unnecessary in an economic environment in which major tech platforms are shedding thousands of workers. Google CEO Sundar Pichai emailed employees on Friday to tell them the company was cutting 12,000 jobs.</p>

The liberal Chamber of Progress, which partners with Google, said the Justice Department's case is unwarranted.

CEO Adam Kovacevich called the case "pretty disconnected from economic reality."

"As the tech sector and advertising industry shed jobs, the Biden administration should be looking for ways to support these sectors rather than undermine what's left," Mr. Kovacevich said in a statement.

Advertising revenue is critical to Google's business. Google reported ad revenue totaling nearly \$54.5 billion in the third quarter of 2022, up more than \$1 billion over the same quarter in the previous year.

The ad revenue represented nearly 80% of Google's total revenue for the third quarter. The company is scheduled to report its fourth-quarter financial performance next week.

The Justice Department said Google's conduct has all but eliminated competition for digital advertising business.

"Google's exclusionary, anticompetitive acts have severely weakened, if not destroyed, competition in the ad tech industry," the lawsuit states. "In decision after decision, year after year, Google has repeatedly done what was necessary to vanquish competitive threats, including by enacting policies that took choices away from its own customers."

The department said Google might claim to protect the privacy interests of people online but instead exploits data to "entrench its monopoly across the digital advertising industry."

This is not the first time the federal government has tackled Google. Under President Trump, the Justice Department took aim at Google and filed an antitrust lawsuit in October 2020 alongside 11 states. The department said Google was "unlawfully maintaining monopolies through anticompetitive and exclusionary practices in the search and advertising markets."

That case is continuing. Some conservative supporters of the Trump-era action, including conservative Internet Accountability Project founder Mike Davis, cheered President Biden's team.

Mr. Davis said the Justice Department's lawsuit represented a step in the right direction and that Congress should follow up with an overhaul of antitrust law. He praised the Biden administration's antitrust division chief at the Justice Department.

"There's not much the Biden administration is doing right, but enforcement of federal antitrust laws is one area on which we agree," Mr. Davis said in a statement. "Big Tech monopolists like Google have far too much control over the digital ad market because they engage in unfair, anticompetitive and illegal practices."

The new lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. Other states joining the legal action are Connecticut, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Tennessee.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Unrelenting menace LockBit ransom gang
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/lockbit-ransomware-attacks/
GIST	HIGH-PROFILE RANSOMWARE ATTACKS have become a fact of life in recent years, and it's not unusual to hear about major monthly attacks perpetrated by Russia-based gangs and their affiliates. But since late 2019, one group has been steadily making a name for itself on a multi-year rampage that has impacted hundreds of organizations around the world. The LockBit ransomware gang may not be the most wildly unhinged of these criminal groups, but its callous persistence, effectiveness, and professionalism make it sinister in its own way.

One of the most prolific ransomware groups ever, the LockBit collective has attempted to maintain a low profile in spite of its volume of attacks. But as it has grown, the group has gotten more aggressive and perhaps careless. Earlier this month, the LockBit malware was notably used in [an attack on the United Kingdom's Royal Mail](#) that hobbled operations. After other recent visible attacks, like one on a Canadian children's hospital, all eyes are now on LockBit.

"They are the most notorious ransomware group, because of sheer volume. And the reason for their success is that the leader is a good businessman," says Jon DiMaggio, chief security strategist at Analyst1 who has [studied LockBit's operations extensively](#). "It's not that he's got this great leadership capability. They made a point-and-click ransomware that anyone could use, they update their software, they're constantly looking for user feedback, they care about their user experience, they poach people from rival gangs. He runs it like a business, and because of that, it is very, very attractive to criminals."

Keep It Professional

For the Royal Mail, LockBit was a chaos agent. On January 11, the UK postal service's international shipping ground to a halt after being hit with a cyberattack. For more than a week, the company has [told customers not to send new international parcels](#)—adding further disorganization after [workers went on strike over pay and conditions](#). The attack was later [linked to](#) LockBit.

Just before Christmas, a LockBit member attacked the SickKids hospital in Canada, impacting its internal systems and phone lines, causing [delays to medical images and lab tests](#). The group quickly backtracked after the attack, providing a [free decryptor and saying it had blocked](#) the member responsible. In October, LockBit also demanded an [unusually high \\$60 million payment](#) from a UK car dealership chain.

Adding to its infamy, LockBit is also one of the most prolific and aggressive ransomware groups when it comes to targeting manufacturing and industrial control systems. Security firm Dragos [estimated](#) in October that in the second and third quarters of 2022, the LockBit malware was used in 33 percent of ransomware attacks on industrial organizations and 35 percent of those against infrastructure.

In November, the US Department of Justice [reported](#) that LockBit's ransomware has been used against at least 1,000 victims worldwide, including in the United States. "LockBit members have made at least \$100 million in ransom demands and have extracted tens of millions of dollars in actual ransom payments from their victims," the Justice Department wrote. The FBI first began investigating the group in early 2020. In February 2022, the agency [released an alert](#) warning that LockBit "employs a wide variety of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), creating significant challenges for defense."

LockBit emerged at the end of 2019, first calling itself "ABCD ransomware." Since then, it has grown rapidly. The group is a "ransomware-as-a-service" operation, meaning that a core team creates its malware and runs its website while licensing out its code to "affiliates" who launch attacks.

Typically, when ransomware-as-a-service groups successfully attack a business and get paid, they'll share a cut of the profits with the affiliates. In the case of LockBit, Jérôme Segura, senior director of threat intelligence at Malwarebytes, says the affiliate model is flipped on its head. Affiliates collect payment from their victims directly and then pay a fee to the core LockBit team. The structure seemingly works well and is reliable for LockBit. "The affiliate model was really well ironed out," Segura says.

Though researchers have repeatedly seen cybercriminals of all sorts professionalizing and streamlining their operations over the past decade, many prominent and prolific ransomware groups adopt [flamboyant](#) and [unpredictable](#) public personas to garner notoriety and intimidate victims. In contrast, LockBit is known for being relatively consistent, focused, and organized.

"Of all the groups, I think they have probably been the most businesslike, and that is part of the reason for their longevity," says Brett Callow, a threat analyst at the antivirus company Emsisoft. "But the fact that they post a lot of victims on their site doesn't necessarily equate to them being the most prolific ransomware group of all, as some would claim. They are probably quite happy with being described that way, though. That's just good for recruitment of new affiliates."

The group certainly isn't all hype, though. LockBit seems to invest in both technical and logistical innovations in an attempt to maximize profits. Peter Mackenzie, director of incident response at security firm Sophos, says, for example, that the group has experimented with new methods for pressuring its victims into paying ransoms.

"They've got different ways of paying," Mackenzie says. "You could pay to have your data deleted, pay to have it released early, pay to extend your deadline," Mackenzie says, adding that LockBit opened its payment options to anyone. This could, theoretically at least, result in a rival company buying a ransomware victim's data. "From the victim's perspective, it's extra pressure on them, which is what helps make people pay," Mackenzie says.

Since LockBit debuted, its creators have spent significant time and effort developing its malware. The group has [issued](#) two big updates to the code—LockBit 2.0, released in mid-2021, and LockBit 3.0, released in June 2022. The two versions are also known as LockBit Red and LockBit Black, respectively. Researchers say the technical evolution has paralleled changes in how LockBit works with affiliates. Prior to the release of LockBit Black, the group worked with an exclusive group of 25 to 50 affiliates at most. Since the 3.0 release, though, the gang has opened up significantly, making it harder to keep tabs on the number of affiliates involved and also making it more difficult for LockBit to exercise control over the collective.

LockBit frequently expands its malware with new features, but above all, the malware's characteristic trait is that it's simple and easy to use. At its core, the ransomware has always offered anti-detection capabilities, tools for circumventing Microsoft Windows defenses, and features for privilege escalation within a compromised device. LockBit uses publicly available hacking tools when it can, but it also develops custom capabilities. The 2022 FBI report noted that the group sometimes uses previously unknown or [zero day vulnerabilities](#) in its attacks. And the group has the capability to target many different types of systems.

"It's not just Windows. They'll attack Linux, they'll go after your virtual host machines," Mackenzie says. "They offer a solid payment system. There's a lot of backend infrastructure that comes with this. It's just a well-made product, unfortunately." In October, it was [reported](#) that LockBit's malware was deployed after a zero day was used to hack Microsoft Exchange servers—a relatively rare occurrence when it comes to ransomware gangs.

"There are additional features that make the ransomware more dangerous—for example, having worm components to it," Segura adds. "They've also discussed things like doing denial-of-service attacks against victims, in addition to the extortion."

With the release of LockBit 3.0, the group also signaled its intention to evolve. It introduced the first ransomware [bug bounty scheme](#), promising to pay legitimate security researchers or criminals who could identify flaws in its website or encryption software. LockBit said it would pay anyone \$1 million if they could name who is behind LockBitSupp, the public persona of the group.

The core members at the top of LockBit seem to include its leader and one or two other trusted partners. Analyst's DiMaggio, who has tracked the actors for years, notes that the group claims to be based in the Netherlands. Its leader has said at various times that he personally operates out of China or even the United States, where he has said he is a part owner of two restaurants in New York City. LockBit members all seem to be Russian-speaking, though, and DiMaggio says that while he cannot be certain, he believes the group is based in Russia.

"The leader doesn't seem to have any concern about being arrested. He thinks he's a supervillain, and he plays the part well," DiMaggio says. "But I do believe he has a healthy concern that if the Russian government were to get their hooks in him, he would have to make the decision to turn over most of his money to them or do work for them like helping them with the Ukraine war."

Beware the Spotlight

Despite LockBit's relative professionalism, the group has, at times, slipped into showboating and bizarre behavior. During desperate efforts to get attention—and attract affiliates—in its early months, the criminal group held an [essay-writing competition](#) and paid prizes to the winners. And in September 2022, the group memorably posted a message on a cybercrime forum claiming it would pay anyone \$1,000 if they got the LockBit logo tattooed on themselves. Around 20 people [shared photos and videos](#) with their feet, wrists, arms, and chests all branded with the cybercrime gang's logo.

LockBit's meteoric rise and recent attacks against high-profile targets could ultimately be its downfall, though. Notorious ransomware groups have been infiltrated, exposed, and disrupted in recent years. Before Russia's full-scale invasion of [Ukraine](#) in February 2022, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) [arrested high-profile REvil hackers](#), although the group has since [returned](#). Meanwhile, the US military hacking unit Cyber Command has admitted to [disrupting](#) some ransomware groups. And a Ukrainian cybersecurity researcher contributed to the [downfall of the Conti ransomware brand](#) last year after infiltrating the group and publishing more than [60,000 of the group's internal chat messages](#).

These deterrent actions appear to be having some impact on the overall ransomware ecosystem. While it is difficult to determine real totals of how much money ransomware actors take in, researchers who track cybercriminal groups and those who specialize in cryptocurrency tracing have noticed that ransomware gangs seem to be [taking in less money](#) as government enforcement actions impede their operations and more victims refuse to pay.

The screws are already turning on LockBit. An apparently disgruntled LockBit developer [leaked its 3.0 code in September](#), and Japanese law enforcement has [claimed it can decrypt the ransomware](#). US law enforcement is closely watching the group as well, and its recent attacks can only have raised its profile. In November 2022, the FBI revealed that an alleged LockBit affiliate, Mikhail Vasiliev, 33, had been [arrested in Canada](#) and would be extradited to the US. At the time, deputy attorney general Lisa O. Monaco said officials had been investigating LockBit for more than two and a half years.

"I think LockBit is going to have a rough year this year and potentially see their numbers go down," Analyst1's DiMaggio says. "They are under a lot of scrutiny now, and they also may have lost their main developer, so they could have development issues that bite them in the ass. It'll be interesting to see. These guys don't care about anyone or anything."

LockBit has seemingly been so dangerous and prolific because it maintained standards for the types of targets its affiliates could hit and avoided attracting too much attention while casting a wide net. But times have changed, and shutting down the UK's international mail exports for more than a week isn't exactly keeping a low profile.

"They do have a bit of a PR problem when it comes to their affiliates at this point, because they obviously can't seem to handle them very well," Malwarebytes' Segura says. "The bragging, hitting some pretty critical infrastructure, and high-visibility targets is a very dangerous game they're playing. LockBit has a big target on its back right now."

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HEADLINE	01/24 Vice Society targets manufacturing
SOURCE	https://www.trendmicro.com/en_us/research/23/a/vice-society-ransomware-group-targets-manufacturing-companies.html
GIST	The Vice Society ransomware group made headlines in late 2022 and early 2023 during a spate of attacks against several targets, such as the one that affected the rapid transit system in San Francisco. Most reports have the threat actor focusing its efforts on the education and the healthcare industries. However, through Trend Micro's telemetry data, we have evidence that the group is also targeting the manufacturing sector, which means that they have capability and desire to penetrate different industries — most likely accomplished via the purchasing of compromised credentials from underground channels. We

have detected the presence of Vice Society in Brazil (primarily affecting the country's manufacturing industry), Argentina, Switzerland, and Israel.

Vice Society, which was initially reported to be exploiting the [PrintNightmare vulnerability](#) in their routines, have previously [deployed ransomware variants](#) such as Hello Kitty/Five Hands and Zeppelin (the group's email has been in their ransom notes). More recently, Vice Society has been able to develop its own [custom ransomware builder](#) and adopt more robust encryption methods. This, and any further enhancements, could mean that the group is preparing for their own ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) operation.

The weaponized tool used by Vice Society is [Cobalt Strike](#), which allows the group to remotely access and control the infected endpoint. The threat actor also used the Rubeus C# toolset for raw Kerberos interaction and abuse (although this is not a new technique, since it has been previously used by Ryuk, Conti, and [BlackCat](#)).

To laterally move within the target network, Mimikatz was used to dump passwords and the Kape tool for copying files. We also observed the presence of the Zeppelin ransomware from another endpoint that also uses Kape for data exfiltration. Vice Society was known to have deployed Zeppelin before, however, perhaps due to its weaker encryption, the threat actor decided to go with custom-built ransomware.

Vice Society will then execute a PowerShell script to create an administrator account that allows for the remote access of other endpoints and to terminate several processes such as running security software before dropping the custom-built ransomware. In most of the ViceSociety detections we also observed the presence of Neshta file infector (which can be cleaned by Trend Micro), although it is not clear how this occurred.

Virtual servers, such as Microsoft Hyper-V, are also affected in this attack. We also found the attacker removing traces of RDP sessions such as wevtutil.exe, a technique that was [previously used by Clop ransomware](#) and KillDisk.

Conclusion...

Vice Society seems to be constantly improving their capabilities, managing to build their own custom-built ransomware while also continuing to employ toolsets such as Cobalt Strike and malware such as Zeppelin and Hello Kitty/FiveHands to enhance their routines. Furthermore, the use of the Kape tool can speed up the identification of important files from a computer. Given what we know of the group's technical knowledge and their willingness to target several different industries and regions, we can expect them to remain a significant player in the ransomware landscape and a threat that organizations must keep track of moving forward.

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HEADLINE	01/24 GoTo (LogMeIn): hackers stole data
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/goto-says-hackers-stole-customers-backups-and-encryption-key/
GIST	<p>GoTo (formerly LogMeIn) is warning customers that threat actors who breached its development environment in November 2022 stole encrypted backups containing customer information and an encryption key for a portion of that data.</p> <p>GoTo provides a platform for cloud-based remote working, collaboration, and communication, as well as remote IT management and technical support solutions.</p> <p>In November 2022, the company disclosed a security breach on its development environment and a cloud storage service used by both them and its affiliate, LastPass.</p> <p>At the time, the impact on the client data had yet to become known as the company's investigation into the incident with the help of cybersecurity firm Mandiant had just begun.</p>

The internal investigation so far has revealed that the incident had a significant impact on GoTo's customers.

According to a [GoTo's security incident notification](#) a reader shared with BleepingComputer, the attack affected backups relating to the Central and Pro product tiers stored in a third-party cloud storage facility.

"Our investigation to date has determined that a threat actor exfiltrated encrypted backups related to Central and Pro from a third-party cloud storage facility," reads the notice to customers.

"In addition, we have evidence that a threat actor also exfiltrated an encryption key for a portion of the encrypted data. However, as part of our security protocols, we salt and hash Central and Pro account passwords. This provides an additional layer of security within the encrypted backups." - GoTo

The information present in the exfiltrated backups includes the following:

- Central and Pro account usernames
- Central and Pro account passwords (salted and hashed)
- Deployment and provisioning information
- One-to-Many scripts (Central only)
- Multi-factor authentication information
- Licensing and purchasing data like emails, phone numbers, billing address, and last four digits of credit card numbers.

In response to the situation, GoTo is resetting Central and Pro passwords for impacted customers and automatically migrates accounts to GoTo's enhanced Identity Management Platform.

This platform provides additional security controls that make unauthorized account access or takeover much more challenging.

GoTo has published an [update to the incident](#) saying that it is contacting affected customers directly to offer more details and recommendations for actionable steps to increase the security of their accounts.

While the company has not shared the type of encryption used for the backups, if they used symmetrical encryption, such as AES, then it could be possible to decrypt the backups using the stolen encryption key.

The firm adds that it still has no evidence that the intruders ever got access to its production systems and says that man-in-the-middle attacks couldn't have any impact on clients because TLS 1.2 encryption and peer-to-peer technology are used to prevent eavesdropping.

GoTo's investigation into the incident is still underway, and the company promised to update customers should any important findings surface.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Arrests: Europe, US Bitzlato crackdown
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/arrests-across-europe-and-u-s-in-bitzlato-crackdown/
GIST	<p>An operation led by French and U.S. authorities, and strongly supported by Europol, has targeted the crypto exchange platform Bitzlato. The globally operating Hong Kong-registered cryptocurrency exchange is suspected of facilitating the laundering of large amounts of criminal proceeds and converting them into roubles.</p> <p>The operation also involved law enforcement and judicial authorities from Belgium, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands. Law enforcement authorities took down the digital infrastructure of the service, based in France, and interrogated leading members of the platform's management. Five individuals have</p>

been arrested so far (in Cyprus, Spain and the U.S.). The action follows the January 18 arrest of Bitzlato's founder in the U.S.

Targeting crucial crime facilitators such as crypto exchanges is becoming a key priority in the battle against cybercrime. Bitzlato allowed the rapid conversion of various crypto-assets such as bitcoin, ethereum, litecoin, bitcoin cash, dash, dogecoin and USDT into Russian rubles. It is estimated that the crypto exchange platform has received a total of assets worth EUR 2.1 billion (BTC 119,000).

While the conversion of crypto-assets into fiat currencies is not illegal, investigations into the cybercriminal operators indicated that large volumes of criminal assets were going through the platform. The analysis indicated that about 46% of the assets exchanged through Bitzlato, worth roughly EUR 1 billion, had links to criminal activities. Europol says that already over 3,500 bitcoin addresses and over a 1000 Bitzlato user details showed links with various criminal cases reported in Europol's systems. Analysis of this data and other related cases is expected to trigger further investigative activities.

Cryptanalysis uncovered that the majority of suspicious transactions are linked to entities sanctioned by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), with others linked to cyber scams, money laundering, ransomware and child abuse material. For example, investigations showed that 1.5 million BTC transactions have been made directly between Bitzlato users and the Hydramarket, taken down in April 2022.

This exchange platform, available both in Russian and English language, rented dedicated servers from a hosting company in France. The coordinated action of the judicial and law enforcement authorities from the different involved countries led to the takedown of the platform, seizures of present financial assets, and further technical analysis.

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[Read more at Europol](#)

Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/23 White supremacists in power grid attacks?
SOURCE	https://www.ideastream.org/2023-01-23/white-supremacists-might-be-to-blame-for-an-uptick-in-power-grid-attacks-in-the-pnw
GIST	<p>MARY LOUISE KELLY, HOST:</p> <p>In the Pacific Northwest, there were more attacks on the power grid last year than in the previous six years combined. Now, it is not clear who is behind most of the incidents or if they are indeed connected. But the FBI has been warning utilities of white supremacist plans for such attacks. That is according to an investigation by Conrad Wilson from Oregon Public Broadcasting and John Ryan from member station KUOW in Seattle.</p> <p>JOHN RYAN, BYLINE: After a series of power outages on Christmas Day on the outskirts of Tacoma, Wash., the 911 calls poured in.</p> <p>(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)</p> <p>UNIDENTIFIED PERSON #1: 911, what are you reporting?</p> <p>UNIDENTIFIED PERSON #2: The power station over here off of Kapowsin Highway, and it's on fire.</p> <p>UNIDENTIFIED PERSON #1: OK.</p> <p>UNIDENTIFIED PERSON #2: Three of the transformers are burning on top.</p>

RYAN: Power substations convert high voltages into the lower voltages that keep America's lights on and appliances running. Somebody had cut their way into four substations and sabotaged the equipment inside. They knocked out power to more than 10,000 people. Tacoma Public Utility officials called for emergency help.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON #3: The reason for the large power outage down there is we had someone break into our substation and open the circuit breakers and pry open boxes. So I was trying to get someone to respond to the substation.

RYAN: The Christmas attacks were just the latest of 15 grid attacks in the northwest since June. In most cases, the motives aren't known. By New Year's Eve, two local men had been arrested for the Christmas crimes. Prosecutors say the men didn't appear to have political motives. They aimed to knock out power so they could rob local businesses undetected.

DOUG JOHNSON: The arrests are encouraging, but we believe that the threat still exists.

RYAN: Doug Johnson is a spokesperson for the Bonneville Power Administration. The federal agency sells hydropower in the Northwest.

JOHNSON: We have not slowed down our efforts to further harden our substations and protect them in a physical manner.

CONRAD WILSON, BYLINE: In November and early December of last year, as the attacks accelerated, the FBI warned utilities of an increase in threats from racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists. That's government speak for neo-Nazis. The FBI bulletin say extremist calls to sabotage the grid were possibly to blame for the attacks in the Northwest prior to the ones on Christmas Day.

MARY MCCORD: We're in a real wave of domestic extremist violence right now that's been increasing for several years.

WILSON: Mary McCord is a former top national security official at the Department of Justice. McCord says it doesn't matter to extremist groups who actually carries out the attacks. Just the fact that the attacks are happening contributes to their goal of sowing discord.

MCCORD: White supremacists and others who are seeking to advance their own causes for ideological reasons can use that to sort of advance their purported goals of causing the chaos, undermining the government, undermining general stability.

WILSON: Neo-Nazi groups have launched several plots to take out the U.S. grid in recent years. They've even put out how-to manuals to make it easier to attack vulnerable parts of the nation's critical infrastructure. Joshua Fisher-Birch is a researcher with the Counter Extremism Project, which tracks these groups' online activities.

JOSHUA FISHER-BIRCH: The recent substation attacks have been spoken about in glowing terms by certain members of the extreme right and particularly by neo-Nazi accelerationists.

RYAN: Whoever is behind these attacks, energy experts say they're playing with fire. Ian Cope is a spokesperson for the Grays Harbor Public Utility District in Southwest Washington. His utility was targeted three times last year.

IAN COPE: You're talking about thousands of megawatts of electricity coming through these highly sensitive pieces of equipment. And it's somewhat miraculous that this hasn't led to a fatality yet.

RYAN: Federal energy officials in December launched a four-month study of ways to protect America's far-flung electrical grid from bad actors. For now, much of the system is so fragile that it doesn't take sophisticated conspiracies to do major damage. For NPR News, I'm John Ryan in Seattle.

	WILSON: And I'm Conrad Wilson in Portland. Transcript provided by NPR, Copyright NPR.
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HEADLINE	01/24 New sanctions on Iran's Guard Corps
SOURCE	https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/west-imposes-new-sanctions-on-irans-guards-corps-2023-1-24-0/
GIST	<p>The United States, European Union and the United Kingdom have imposed fresh sanctions on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) over its crackdown on protests in Iran.</p> <p>On January 23, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the IRGC's Cooperative Foundation and five of its board members — Deputy Minister of Intelligence and Security Naser Rashedi and four senior IRGC commanders. The Treasury accused the IRGC Cooperative Foundation of having become “a wellspring of corruption and graft” and said its funds have supported the IRGC's military adventures abroad.</p> <p>The IRGC was set up shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution to protect the clerical ruling system in Iran. It has an estimated 125,000-strong military with army, navy and air units, and also commands the Basij religious militia, which is often used in crackdowns.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the European Union also imposed sanctions on more than 30 Iranian officials and organizations, including units of the IRGC, blaming them for a “brutal” crackdown on protesters and other human rights abuses. Foreign ministers from the EU's 27 member countries agreed on the measures at a meeting in Brussels on January 23.</p> <p>The new sanctions were imposed on 18 people and 19 entities. Those targeted cannot travel to the EU, and any assets they hold inside the bloc can be frozen.</p> <p>Some EU governments and the European Parliament have made it clear that they want the IRGC as a whole to be added to the bloc's list of terrorist organizations. But the EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, noted that this could only happen if a court in an EU country determine the IRGC is guilty of terrorism.</p> <p>The UK also imposed sanctions on Iranian individuals and entities on January 23 over the country's “brutal repression” of its people. The sanctions included an asset freeze on Iranian deputy prosecutor general Ahmad Fazelian, who the British foreign office said was responsible for an unfair judicial system that used the death penalty for political purposes.</p> <p>Others sanctioned by the United Kingdom include Kiyumars Heidari, commander in chief of Iran's ground forces; Hossein Nejat, deputy commander of the IRGC; and the Basij Resistance Force deputy commander, Salar Abnough. The Basij Cooperative Foundation, linked to the Basij militia, as well as Qasem Rezaei, deputy commander of Iran's law enforcement forces, were also sanctioned.</p> <p>On January 19, the European Parliament voted through a non-binding motion, calling for the IRGC to be designated as a “terrorist” group. Since then, Iranian officials have strongly criticized the possible listing of the IRGC and warned about its consequences.</p> <p>Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi criticized the EU's “desperate” call, saying that “the new forlorn conspiracy of the enemies of the Islamic Revolution against our powerful IRGC, which is a reaction to the revolutionary movement of our forces in the fight against terrorism, as well as a reaction to the vigilance and insight of the people of Islamic Iran, is doomed to failure, as always.”</p> <p>Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian also criticized the move in a phone call with Josep Borrell, saying it was akin to the EU “shooting itself in the foot.”</p>

In another [statement](#), Amir-Abdollahian said that Tehran does not rule out withdrawing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), should the European Union not change its stance regarding the designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

“Iran’s reciprocal measure, which will seek to designate European forces as terrorist armies, will leave a significant impact on the regional military alignment,” the minister added.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran also [warned](#) the bloc against “the consequences of its heretical actions” for “regional and global peace.”

On January 22, Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib issued a [statement](#) condemning the EU for the votes against the IRGC, and highlighted the corps’ status as a “pillar” of Iran’s national security, and praised it as “the largest force fighting against takfiri terrorism” in the region. The minister further reminded EU officials of how Iran had responded to the US when it had designated the IRGC a terrorist organization in 2019, and observed that Europe was geographically closer to the “sensitive West Asian region” than the US.

In April 2019, former US President Donald Trump listed the [IRGC as a terrorist organisation](#), which is still the only time the US blacklisted another nation’s military. Iran responded by declaring the US Central Command (CENTCOM), which oversees the US military presence in the Middle East, as a terrorist entity.

Iran’s long-strained relations with the West have deteriorated since talks to revive its 2015 nuclear deal deadlocked and after Tehran unleashed the crackdown on protesters last year. Iran’s ties with the West have also been strained after Tehran’s supply of drones for Russia in its war against Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Australia police foil teen’s mass killing plot
SOURCE	https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-25/court-told-of-teenager-accused-of-murder-intent/101890860
GIST	<p>An Adelaide teenager accused of plotting a mass killing was allegedly caught near Rundle Mall armed with weapons including a Molotov cocktail.</p> <p>The 17-year-old boy — who cannot be identified for legal reasons — faced the Adelaide Youth Court charged with possessing an item with the intent to kill or cause harm.</p> <p>Magistrate Ted Iuliano said the boy was facing serious charges and was a serious risk to the community.</p> <p>Court documents allege the boy had the components and fuel to make a Molotov cocktail, as well as knives and scissors with the intention to kill people late last week.</p> <p>He was apprehended by police from the Counter Terrorism and Security Section near Rundle Mall just after midnight on January 20, whilst allegedly looking for an industrial bin he could set fire to, in order to create a diversion of emergency response crews while he attacked the target location by Molotov cocktail.</p> <p>He was charged with possessing an item with an intent to kill or cause harm.</p> <p>The documents also state the accused told police his plans involved burning an occupied shop or nightclub with the intention of killing 25 people before taking his own life, in order to gain "notoriety".</p> <p>"The accused travelled by bus and tram to Glenelg, however no suitable high-density location was selected," the documents state.</p> <p>"The accused travelled from Glenelg to the city."</p> <p>According to the documents, the boy — who is in the care of the Department for Child Protection — told a youth worker the night before "he was going out and 'killing so many people I will be on the news tomorrow'".</p>

	<p>The youth worker then allegedly reported the boy missing.</p> <p>Court documents further stated he was arrested just after midnight by STAR operations, with police seizing a diary detailing plans for a mass-killing event.</p> <p>Police allege the boy also had a white T-shirt with the handwritten motif 'NATURAL SELECTION', numerous notebooks containing drafts of his plan to kill as many people as possible — stating that it would be more than the Columbine High School massacre.</p> <p>According to the documents, the boy told police in his interview that he identified as one of the Columbine school shooters and had "a similar outlook", even etching the name of that shooter on his knives.</p> <p>He had also allegedly tried to source a handgun and ammunition, and the court documents state that a diary entry outlined he would source it in the next few days.</p> <p>The teenager allegedly told police he had practised, filmed and carried out research into the effectiveness of his Molotov cocktails.</p> <p>Police are expecting to lay further charges after the teenager's digital devices are analysed.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the court heard a risk assessment had not yet been done by the Fixated Risk Assessment team — a counter-terrorism team — and the boy was yet to be assessed by a psychiatrist.</p> <p>He has been remanded in youth detention to face court again in March.</p> <p>SA Police said that, following the arrest of the boy last Friday, there were no longer "safety concerns for the public" and that the investigation was ongoing.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 OFAC adds 6 to terrorism sanctions list
SOURCE	https://www.europeansanctions.com/2023/01/ofac-adds-6-to-terrorism-sanctions-list-over-alleged-links-to-hizballah/
GIST	OFAC today designated Lebanese national Hassan Moukalled , a money exchanger and ‘financial expert’ who is alleged to play a key role in enabling Hizballah to exploit and exacerbate Lebanon’s economic crisis, alongside his sons Rayyan Moukalled and Rani Moukalled . CTEX Exchange, Lebanese Company for Information and Studies (LCIS) and Lebanese Company for Publishing, Media, and Research and Studies (LCPMR) were also listed for being owned / controlled by Hassan Moukalled. All designations were made pursuant to Executive Order 13224 , as amended (counter terrorism sanctions).
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HEADLINE	01/25 Israel soldiers foil terror stabbing attack
SOURCE	https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/366431
GIST	<p>Israeli soldiers foiled an attempted terrorist stabbing attack in Samaria Wednesday.</p> <p>The incident took place on Route 55, just outside of the Israeli town of Kedumim just before noon Wednesday morning, when an Arab terrorist armed with a knife approached an army position and attempted to stab a soldier.</p> <p>IDF forces on the scene opened fire and neutralized the terrorist.</p> <p>No Israelis were wounded in the foiled attack.</p> <p>"A short while ago, an armed assailant attempted to carry out a stabbing attack on Route 55 adjacent to the town of Kedumim," an IDF spokesperson said. "The assailant, armed with a knife, arrived at an IDF</p>

military post and attempted to stab an IDF soldier at the scene. The assailant was neutralized by the soldiers in the area. No IDF injuries were reported."

According to Palestinian Authority's WAFA media outlet, the terrorist, 20-year-old resident of the northern Samaria city of Jenin Aref Abdul Nasser Lahlouh, was fatally wounded.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/23 What happened to Teekah Lewis?
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/teekah-lewis-disappeared-24-years-ago-tacoma-bowling-alley/281-3264505e-6c91-4d21-a59b-a0c4367e09d8
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — The family of a missing toddler who disappeared 24 years ago from a Tacoma bowling alley held a candlelight vigil Monday night at the Tacoma Police Headquarters in the hopes that new information will surface.</p> <p>Teekah Lewis was 2 years old when she vanished from New Frontier Lanes bowling alley in Tacoma on Jan. 23, 1999.</p> <p>"I'm asking the community to please come forward with any information you have on Teekah, it could be the littlest thing, it could be your neighbor that looks like Teekah, you never know," said the girl's mother, Theresa Czapiewski.</p> <p>Theresa Czapiewski, has held candlelight vigils for Lewis every year since her disappearance. She said each year she holds out hope that Lewis will show up at the vigil.</p> <p>Czapiewski said it's the first time since Teekah disappeared that law enforcement officials and the Tacoma mayor came to the vigil.</p> <p>New details released in December 2022 and an updated age-progression photo showing what Lewis might look like nearly 24 years later renewed Czapiewski's hopes.</p> <p>Czapiewski said she cried when she first saw the picture earlier this fall.</p> <p>"Because after all these years they finally made a picture that looks like my daughter," Czapiewski said in December.</p> <p>Teekah's sister, Katarina Johnson, also spoke at the vigil and said she was hoping someone could bring their family some answers.</p> <p>"It's been 24 years, 24 years too long honestly," Johnson said. "Even if you think it's the smallest little thing, anything helps, any tips. We just want her home, we want closure honestly, whatever it is, good or bad, we just want that, our family deserves it. Our grandma left this earth not knowing what happened to one of her grandchildren which is the saddest thing."</p> <p>Lewis was described by her sisters as a "mature" toddler, but someone who never left her mother's side.</p> <p>In 2020, detectives said they were looking for a person of interest who was seen near Lewis that night.</p> <p>The witness described the person as a white male, about 5 feet, 11 inches, with a "husky" build, with brown, curly or wavy hair, a mustache and pockmarks on his face.</p> <p>The witness said the man was wearing blue jeans and a blue checkered, flannel shirt.</p>

	<p>Detectives had not previously released information about the man's clothing.</p> <p>In December, Tacoma police revealed a description of a car seen leaving the bowling alley that night, a maroon or dark-colored Pontiac Grand Am, perhaps a late 1980s or early 1990s model leaving the parking lot at a high rate of speed.</p> <p>Detective Julie Dier said investigators remain motivated to solve the 1999 case.</p> <p>"The fact that it was a small child, that's always going to keep someone motivated," Dier said.</p> <p>Dier said it's possible Lewis is still alive and may have been too young to remember that she was abducted.</p> <p>Detectives and family members hope that someone seeing the photos of Lewis will remember something from the day of the incident or recognize one of the age-progression photos.</p> <p>"That's one thing I will not do is give up on Teekah," Czapiewski said in December. "Maybe she'll look and see, 'Wow, that girl looks like me.'"</p> <p>Anyone with information about the case can leave anonymous tips at the Tacoma Crimestoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Pentagon: metallic orb over Iraq in 2016
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/pentagon-usa-navy/2023/01/24/id/1105724/
GIST	<p>An image collected by a U.S. spy plane reportedly shows a metallic orb UFO that flew over Iraq in 2016.</p> <p>According to the U.S. version of The Sun publication, the spy-plane photo was featured in a classified video briefing shown to American government agencies.</p> <p>It potentially marks the first time an Unidentified Flying Object has been filmed in an active conflict zone. The Sun first learned of the image through Jeremy Corbell and George Knapp, two UFO investigators who have since posted the somewhat-grainy photo on their "Weaponized" podcast page.</p> <p>The unusual image was reportedly collected in April 2016, and has since been designated as an Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena — the term most commonly used by U.S. government officials, when discussing UFOs.</p> <p>The image footage on the classified video briefing runs roughly four seconds and shows the UAP "moving with purpose" in a lateral direction, from south to north, according to The Sun.</p> <p>From Corbell's perspective, the image represents an "entirely different scenario" to previous sightings of UFOs or UAPs by U.S. Navy fighter pilots.</p> <p>"For the first time, we are releasing a military filmed image of a UAP over an active conflict zone," said Corbell, while adding the UAP poses "significant risk to our servicemen and women, and this case highlights this — and is unfortunately not unique."</p> <p>Corbell continued: "Origin, capability, operator and intent has not been determined in relation to this intelligently controlled UFO over Mosul, Iraq. At a minimum, UAP pose a fundamental intelligence and combat identification problem that must be addressed."</p> <p>According to The Sun, Corbell insisted the Pentagon's All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office dedicates sufficient resources to "this enduring mystery on behalf of the American and global public."</p>

Return to Top	<p>And on his podcast, Corbell declared, "No matter where UFOs are from — it is now openly admitted by our Department of Defense that they are appearing with an increased frequency worldwide."</p> <p>The Sun reports that, in 2020, the U.S. government released a series of videos covering the supposed sightings of three UFO or UAP encounters.</p> <p>For one video, two U.S. Navy officers — Commander Dave Fravor and Lt. Commander Alex Dietrich — spotted a UFO off the coast of San Diego, California.</p> <p>The UFO/UAP aircraft in question started at 80,000 feet, stealthily plunged to 20,000 feet, and then disappeared from radar, according to reports.</p> <p>In his description of the UFO, Commander Fravor reportedly said: "It had no wings. So you think, 'OK, it's a helicopter,' but there's no rotor wash in the water, there's no rotors and when helicopters move from side-to-side, they're kind of slow then pick up speed going the other way."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 China misuse US legal system for IP theft?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/24/china-russia-could-use-us-courts-get-military-tech/
GIST	<p>Sen. John Kennedy is sounding the alarm over a potential misuse of the U.S. legal system that would allow adversaries like Russia and China to fund lawsuits against American companies and use the discovery process to obtain military technology or intellectual property.</p> <p>Mr. Kennedy, Louisiana Republican and a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, sent a letter this month to Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Attorney General Merrick Garland raising the national security risks linked to third-party litigation funding, which has little to no transparency requirements.</p> <p>“Few safeguards exist in any form of law, rule, or regulation to prevent foreign adversaries from participating in civil litigation as an undisclosed third-party in our country’s federal courtrooms — this resulting in our national security and our entire government being vulnerable to manipulation,” Mr. Kennedy wrote in his Jan. 6 letter.</p> <p>“As a member of the Judiciary Committee, I ask that the Department of Justice provide details about any course of action that has been taken to mitigate this threat. I also recommend that the Judicial Conference of the United States consider proactively providing guidance to courts from coast to coast as means of preventing foreign entities from hijacking our federal judiciary,” he added.</p> <p>Third-party litigation funding, referred to as TPLF, is a commercial enterprise in which a third party — potentially a hedge fund or even a sovereign wealth fund connected to a government — pays a plaintiff’s legal costs to fund a lawsuit with the intent to reap a portion of the awards if the litigation prevails.</p> <p>Unregulated industry</p> <p>The practice has grown in the United States to become an annual \$2.5 billion to \$5 billion industry, according to the Institute for Legal Reform, a tort reform advocacy group affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.</p> <p>The Government Accountability Office studied the practice and issued a report in December. It found the enterprise began in the United States around 2010.</p> <p>The GAO report emphasizes that the TPLF industry is not “specifically” regulated under federal law and that there is no nationwide requirement for disclosing litigation funding agreements.</p>

“Publicly available data on the market are limited. Some policymakers have raised concerns about the transparency of funding arrangements and other issues,” the report reads.

“Funders and stakeholders [interviewed by the GAO] identified several advantages and disadvantages of third-party litigation financing for users and investors,” the report reads. “For example, this funding can help underfunded plaintiffs litigate their cases. However, it is expensive and may deter plaintiffs from accepting a settlement offer because they may want to make up the amount they will repay the funder.”

An appendix of the GAO report identifies members of the International Legal Financing Association, a collection of global funding sources for commercial lawsuits, and members of the American Legal Finance Association, a similar collection for U.S. litigation.

A spokesperson for the International Legal Financing Association, whose members include Burford Capital, Omni Bridgeway and Parabellum Capital, among others, dismissed some of the concerns raised by Mr. Kennedy and the Institute for Legal Reform.

“The claims in this letter come directly from baseless Chamber of Commerce talking points, which are unsupported by any evidence. The primary takeaway from this should be the desperation of the Chamber of Commerce. Having unsuccessfully achieved their preferred policy goals, they have now sunken to fear mongering in their efforts to impose regulations that benefit some of their donors,” the spokesperson said. “The commercial legal finance industry provides an essential financing tool that significantly benefits business, especially its ability to level the playing field.”

A spokesperson for the American Legal Finance Association did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Its members include Bridgeway Legal Funding, Law Street Capital and Plaintiff Support, among others.

Funding lawsuits

In the discovery process, a company being sued may have to give the plaintiffs access to its records and communications. An undisclosed funder could use the information to obtain intellectual property or other sensitive information.

A spokesperson for the Supreme Court did respond to a request for comment about Mr. Kennedy’s letter. A spokesperson for the Justice Department confirmed it had received and would respond to the letter.

In his letter, Mr. Kennedy points to a lengthy November report from the Institute for Legal Reform that detailed several third-party litigation funding sources, including Burford Capital, Ryval and Omni Bridgeway.

According to the institute, Burford Capital invested \$4 million into a lawsuit against Chevron in Ecuador in 2020 alleging pollution in exchange for a share of the awards.

Page Faulk, Institute for Legal Reform’s senior vice president for legal reform initiatives, says it’s unclear who is putting money into groups like Burford Capital that are backing such lawsuits.

Spokespersons from Burford Capital, Ryval and Omni Bridgeway declined to comment on their activities or Mr. Kennedy’s concerns.

But Burford Capital CEO Christopher Bogar touted his company’s work to CBS’ “60 Minutes” last month.

“We make the playing field level. And that’s what people should be wanting in litigation,” Mr. Bogar said. “We are a multibillion-dollar company because litigation is expensive. And there’s an awful lot of demand from businesses for this kind of solution.”

Burford Capital backed Craig Underwood, a small jalapeno farmer in California who sought to recover more than \$20 million from a breach of contract deal that caused his farming business to crumble. He won in court with funding from Burford — but ended up paying \$8 million to the company, which had invested \$4 million into the legal fight.

“They stepped in and helped us out when we couldn’t have gotten money from anybody else. They basically rescued us,” Mr. Underwood told CBS.

Chinese connection?

The Institute for Legal Reform’s report cautioned that China Investment Corporation, Beijing’s sovereign wealth fund, may be financing litigation within the U.S.

“Although the extent of foreign TPLF investment in U.S. litigation remains largely unknown due to the current lack of TPLF transparency (which is itself a national security concern), the limited information available suggests that non-U.S. citizens, including sovereign wealth funds, are in fact participating in the U.S. TPLF market,” the report reads.

Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy, dismissed claims about China’s alleged interference in U.S. courts.

“The Chinese side firmly opposes such claims, which are purely subjective and fabricated. China has always adhered to the principle of non-interference in other countries’ internal affairs. We will not interfere in the judicial process in the United States,” Mr. Pengyu said.

“Some U.S. politicians continue to generalize the concept of national security and put obstacles in the way of China-U.S. relations and cooperation in various fields. We urge the U.S. to abandon its zero-sum mentality and stop slandering and attacking China under the pretext of national security,” he added.

Ms. Faulk said that in order to bring transparency, Congress or the executive branch could require foreign actors to disclose in court filings that they are funding litigation. The Department of Justice, too, could amend the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which requires that persons representing foreign interests publicly disclose their affiliations.

“We know some of these hedge funds have investments from sovereign wealth funds, which are owned by foreign states, but there’s no disclosure so we don’t have specific examples of the foreign actors,” Ms. Faulk said.

Chief Judge Colm F. Connolly for the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware issued a standing order last April that would require parties before his courtroom to disclose if they had third-party funding agreements and the potential interests those funders might have. Ms. Faulk said other judges could do the same.

She also pointed to the Litigation Funding Transparency Act, introduced by Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Iowa Republican, during the prior Congress, which would require third-party litigation funders be disclosed.

“The issue with the multibillion dollar third-party litigation funding industry is that it operates in the shadows and there are literally no requirements for transparency — no rules, no legislation — and so we are calling for sunshine to bring it out of the shadows,” Ms. Faulk said.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Violence in Haiti highest in decades
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/gang-related-violence-in-haiti-has-reached-levels-not-seen-in-decades-un-chief-says/ar-AA16H06E
GIST	<p>Over the past three months Haiti has seen some of its worst gang-related violence in decades, affecting the functioning of the judiciary, impeding the government, challenging the United Nations efforts to fight illicit trafficking and keeping children from going to school, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said in his latest report on the deteriorating situation.</p> <p>Even neighborhoods of the capital that were once considered to be relatively safe have now fallen victim to the tightening grip of warring gangs. Just last week, residents of Petionville found themselves trapped in their homes as a gang ambush to the east left three police officers dead, another missing and a fourth injured, as a rise in kidnappings at the southern edge left people scared to go out.</p> <p>Guterres' three-month update of the situation in Haiti paints a deteriorating situation. The U.N. Security Council will take up the report Tuesday morning. Diplomats are looking for not just an update on the security situation, but Haiti's progress toward staging elections to replace its president as well as both chambers of Parliament following the end of the terms of the country's last 10 elected officials earlier this month.</p> <p>In the report, the secretary-general acknowledges that the elections calendar remains uncertain, despite a promise by interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry that 2023 will be an electoral year. Guterres noted that despite efforts by the interim government and the U.N. to stave off a worsening crisis and tackle many of the issues, including an ongoing cholera outbreak, their work has been impeded by the worsening gang violence and kidnappings.</p> <p>He noted that over the last three months the political landscape in Haiti was shaped by three events: the establishment of a U.N. sanctions regime to implement travel bans, asset freezes and a targeted arms embargo against individuals engaging, directly or indirectly, with armed groups and criminal networks; the imposition of bilateral sanctions by the U.S. and Canada against several high-profile Haitian individuals, including a former president, two former prime ministers and two members of the current government; and the request by the Haitian government and the secretary-general for the deployment of an international specialized armed force to assist the Haiti National Police.</p> <p>Direct talks held in early October between Henry and a prominent member of the Commission for a Haitian Solution to the Crisis, otherwise known as the Montana Accord, "ultimately did not make tangible headway." However, new consultations between the government and others members of civil society group and the business community yielded a document, the National Consensus for an Inclusive Transition and Transparent Elections.</p> <p>Though signed by some groups, the document remains the target of criticism, with some political groups saying it has no validity and is there to shore up the little power Henry has.</p> <p>The reporting period was also marked by a siege of the country's main fuel terminal, Varreux, which exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the country and led to the call for a specialized international force to assist the Haitian police. Such a force is still needed, Guterres said, despite the end of a two-month gang siege.</p> <p>The National Port Authority and other commercial ports, for example, "remain under constant gang attacks."</p> <p>"Road transportation remains at risk, with cargo shipping containers and goods being regularly hijacked and stolen," the report said. "Police continued to struggle to maintain patrols around the ports, while gangs retained control of most of the main transport thoroughfares linking Port-au-Prince with the northern and southern departments."</p>

This has also delayed implementation of U.N. efforts to assist Haitian authorities in fighting the illicit trafficking through a border management program being launched by the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime.

“It is vital that major roads and key facilities remain unobstructed to enable the State to function and protect the people of Haiti so that they may safely go about their daily lives,” Guterres said, reiterating his call for the deployment of international forces to help the Haitian national police.

The number of reported homicides for 2022 increased by 35.2% compared with 2021. The majority, nearly 82%, were in the West regional department that includes the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, where a former presidential candidate, Eric Jean Baptiste and the National Police Academy director, Harington Rigaud, were among the victims late last year.

Kidnappings also saw a 104.7% increase, with 1,359 reported victims.

“Despite their determined efforts to curb crime and fight gangs, the overstretched, understaffed and under resourced police force has not been able, on its own, to deter the alarming rise in gang violence,” Guterres said in his report.

“Gang-related violence continued to undermine the functioning of the judicial system, affecting efforts to address the high rate of prolonged pretrial detention, among other activities,” according to the report.

The country’s main courthouse, the Court of First Instance of Port-au-Prince, attacked by gangs in mid-June, was still not under Haitian authorities’ control by the end of the year, the U.N. said. Another facility, the Court of First Instance of Croix-des-Bouquets, which was also attacked and set on fire by gang members, is still being temporarily housed in several government buildings in the neighboring city of Tabarre.

The U.N. reported that gangs continue to use sexual violence as a weapon to inflict terror and to punish and humiliate local populations. Their ultimate goal is to extend their control.

During gang clashes in Croix-des-Bouquets in October, at least 40 women were raped by heavily armed gang members.

“The women were deliberately targeted because they lived in an area controlled by a rival gang. Women and girls also continued to be highly exposed to rape while traveling along roads controlled by gangs,” the U.N. said.

That gang violence has also spilled out into other areas. Of the 10 regional departments in Haiti, only two have at least 90% of their schools open — the Nippes and South departments. In the north, where families are struggling against higher costs of living after a decrease in remittances from abroad and double digit inflation, only 17% of schools are open.

“The situation remains grave,” Guterres said.

He said the security crisis in Haiti is not just affecting daily life but the development of human capital because of the population’s severely limited access to education and employment.

He also noted that the average cost of a food basket, which consists of common foods the population eats such as rice and beans, has increased to nearly 63%, leading to a rise in hunger among almost half of the people in the population of nearly 12 million.

“The unpredictable security situation has hampered agricultural activities, prevented the supplying of markets and slowed down ongoing investment, especially in small-scale trade, the main source of income for a large part of the population,” Guterres said. “People’s livelihoods continue to erode, and humanitarian partners face great difficulty in gaining access to the most vulnerable populations.”

The number of people in an emergency situation, meaning deep hunger, rose by more than 35.5%, with 1 in 20 residents in Port-au-Prince's Cité Soleil living in faminelike conditions. These trends are likely to continue if the level of humanitarian assistance does not increase, the secretary-general said, noting that the hunger crisis is now compounded by the expanding cholera epidemic.

The U.N. and international and national humanitarian partners are facing increasing difficulties in reaching beneficiaries throughout the country to provide water, food and health care because major roads remain blocked by gangs, the secretary-general said. For example, National Road 2, linking the capital to the quake-recovering southern peninsula, has been blocked by gangs since June 2021, cutting off at least 3 million people from Port-au-Prince, the country's economic center.

"The blockade undermines freedom of movement and further contributes to inflation and jeopardizes livelihoods. More recently, the northern departments have also become increasingly isolated from the capital," Guterres wrote.

That has made getting fuel to the areas difficult. For instance, along the road connecting Ouanaminthe in the northeast to Cap-Haïtien in the north, fuel is sold only in gallons on the roadside, if it's available at all. The city of Cap-Haïtien, which just hosted a major international jazz festival that relocated from the capital because of the violence, has been in a total blackout for over a year, residents said.

"Amid the ongoing cholera outbreak, the lack of fuel has further undermined access to health services owing to restrictions on movement and to the impact of fluctuations in the supply of water and electricity on the functioning of medical facilities," the U.N. report said.

The turf battles between heavily armed gangs, while not occurring everywhere, is nevertheless having an impact on the human rights situation, especially in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince and in the Artibonite and North departments, the report details.

"Gangs are increasingly targeting local populations, deliberately killing, injuring and committing acts of sexual violence during coordinated armed attacks to expand their territorial control."

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HEADLINE	01/24 Group: 2022 deadly year for journalists
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/24/world/americas/journalist-deaths.html
GIST	<p>Even with journalists from around the world covering the biggest conflict in Europe since World War II, it was Latin America that proved deadliest for reporters last year, with violence against them spiking to new levels, a monitoring group said Tuesday.</p> <p>There were 67 killings reported for 2022 around the world — the most deaths in five years — and nearly half of those took place in the region, the Committee to Protect Journalists said in its annual report.</p> <p>"Despite countries across Latin America being nominally at peace," the nonprofit news group said, "the region surpassed the high number of journalists killed in the Ukraine war."</p> <p>Mexico alone accounted for 13 of the deaths, the most the group has ever recorded there in a single year. Seven journalists were reported killed in Haiti.</p> <p>In Ukraine, where fighting has killed an estimated 40,000 civilians since Russia invaded last February, 15 people in the media business were reported dead.</p> <p>But journalists there are covering combat, not daily life.</p> <p>In Latin America, the journalists' committee said, reporters face death if they cover topics like corruption, gang violence and the environment.</p>

Katherine Corcoran, a longtime correspondent in Mexico, said Tuesday that it was most dangerous for local reporters, who lack the protections that come with working for international news organizations.

“It just keeps getting worse,” said Ms. Corcoran, author of a [2022 book](#) that examined attacks on the press in Mexico.

Counterintuitive as it may seem, she said, the most dangerous time to be a journalist is often not when an autocratic government is in full control and officials may feel “there is really no need to kill a reporter,” but when democracy begins to take hold and the power centers shift.

The deaths of at least 41 of the journalists and media workers killed last year were directly tied to their work, the committee said. It noted in particular the shooting of [Shireen Abu Akleh](#), a veteran Palestinian-American television correspondent, and the deaths of four radio journalists in the Philippines who had been covering local politics and corruption.

In Mexico, journalists say that they are doing their jobs in fear, and that even being a prominent reporter no longer seems to afford protection.

In December, gunmen on a motorcycle [fired on a well-known news anchor](#) outside his home in the capital. Mexico’s president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, offered somewhat sympathetic words for the anchor, but many journalists argued that his openly hostile posture toward the press had put them in danger.

Even those who try to avoid covering Mexico’s notoriously violent drug traffickers, focusing instead on, say, corruption, sometimes discover that their reporting paths have led them to the narco trade, Ms. Corcoran said.

In Haiti, where brutal gangs have free rein in some neighborhoods, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists said the problem was generalized lawlessness and the country’s overall [humanitarian emergency](#).

In October, Roberson Alphonse, a longtime newspaper and radio reporter who has covered corruption and gang violence, was shot several times on his way to work in the capital, Port-au-Prince, by gunmen in a small pickup truck.

“That’s all right, that’s all right,” Mr. Alphonse said Tuesday.

He was back at work within two months.

Mr. Alphonse, who is 46, said the violence had made it harder than ever for Haitian journalists to do their jobs — and at a time when it is especially important for them to do so. The attacks, he said, are not just on free speech but also on the right of Haitians to be informed.

“We are journalists,” Mr. Alphonse said. “So we have to inform the public and the world about the scale of violence which occurs in our country.”

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HEADLINE	01/24 Bronze statue stolen from Auburn center
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/bronze-statue-cut-down-at-the-ankles-stolen
GIST	<p>AUBURN, Wash. - A bronze statue of a girl outside the Auburn’s Community & Event Center has gone missing. Thieves sawed the statue at the ankles and ran off with it.</p> <p>According to sculptor David Varnau, it is the second theft over the past six weeks of that sculpture. A similar theft took place in King County in December at a private residence.</p> <p>"They basically have bronze that can only be used for scrap at this point," said Varnau.</p>

	<p>He has been in contact with the foundry that poured the original cast of his artwork—they told him the scrap was likely worth \$300 at most, the sculpture was worth well over \$10,000.</p> <p>It is unclear if the two incidents are connected. Varnau told FOX 13 News that the most recent incident was caught on camera; it appears someone used a sawzall to cut through the bronze in less than two minutes.</p> <p>He noted that future editions of the statue will be reinforced to avoid a similar fate. Luckily, a few more editions can be made; he commissioned the sculpture as one of 25, meaning he's still allowed to cast a few more.</p> <p>However, there is frustration that someone would steal his artwork.</p> <p>"For me as a sculptor, it's sad that someone would abuse a piece of art like that," said Varnau. "It brings a lot of joy to the community."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Everett business park shooting: 2 dead
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/everett-police-death-investigation-homicide-amazon-600-riverside-road-reported-shooting-man-unresponsive-gun-violence-snohomish-county-major-crimes#
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash, — A homicide investigation is underway after a man was found dead in the parking lot of a business park in Everett Tuesday morning.</p> <p>According to the Everett Police Department (EPD), officers responded to the 600 block of Riverside Road around 4:30 a.m. after a 911 caller said they heard four or five gunshots in the parking lot.</p> <p>Several businesses are located in the area, including an Amazon fulfillment center, Infarm Seattle, a FedEx Freight facility and PODS Moving and Storage.</p> <p>The 911 caller said when they went outside to see what happened, they found an unresponsive man with blood in a vehicle, according to the EPD. Responding officers arrived at the scene and found the unresponsive man.</p> <p>The man was pronounced dead at the scene.</p> <p>EPD Officer Ora Hamel told KOMO News the Major Crimes Unit responded to the scene and the incident is being investigated as a homicide.</p> <p>Everett police eventually found the suspect dead in a body of water after initiating a search using a police dog and drone.</p> <p>The case has been deemed a “domestic incident that resulted in a murder-suicide” and is still under investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Another USPS mail truck stolen: 3rd in week
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/another-usps-truck-stolen-and-recovered-in-beacon-hill-neighborhood-theft-washington-crime-seattle-usps#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Another USPS mail truck was reported stolen on Tuesday evening at around 6 p.m., marking the third time a mail truck was stolen in the past week. The truck was stolen in the 4300 block of S. Morgan St. in the Beacon Hill neighborhood.</p> <p>Officers made their way to the scene and were told that the truck was last seen headed southbound on 43rd St, according to officials.</p>

	<p>Police say at around 6:30 p.m., Seattle officers received a call that reported that the mail truck was in their neighborhood in the 3900 block of S. Eddy St.</p> <p>In total, the truck was found roughly two blocks from where it was originally located.</p> <p>The postal employee to who the truck belonged was not injured. There was no significant damage to the truck either.</p> <p>It is currently unknown whether this incident is related to the previous week's stolen trucks. A suspect has not been arrested for those incidents.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 State pays violent offender \$250/day
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/accused-violent-offender-still-awaiting-competency-restoration-several-months-later-01-25-2023-king-county-washington-crime-prosecutor-dshs#
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — After more than seven months, there is still no bed for a dangerous repeat offender, and it's costing the state \$250 a day and county and counting.</p> <p>Alexander Jay is facing multiple violent charges for pushing a woman down the stairs, stabbing another woman ten times at a bus stop, and beating a man to death.</p> <p>A judge found Jay incompetent to stand trial and ordered an evaluation last year, but Jay hasn't been able to get a bed at a state hospital to get that done. The state has been ordered by a judge to pay him \$250 each day he has been unable to receive those services.</p> <p>The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) says Jay may be able to be admitted into Western State Hospital in March, but that has been pushed back before.</p> <p>“We will continue to do everything we can to ensure this individual is held and held responsible and restore his competency to stand trial,” King Co. Prosecuting Attorney Leesa Manion said.</p> <p>The latest effort to get a court to intervene in the case has been denied.</p> <p>King County prosecutors asked a court to intervene last November, arguing DSHS should be held in contempt for failing to get Alexander Jay into Western State Hospital or another facility and should have to pay the county for the cost to house Jay in the meantime at the King County Jail, a cost of about \$220 a day.</p> <p>Attorneys for DSHS argued there's no legal precedent to support legal intervention in a criminal case, and having to pay the county to house Jay would take funds away from the already limited funds to provide competency services.</p> <p>A judge ultimately denied the prosecutors' motion to intervene.</p> <p>“We are fighting that every step of the way. We have been in touch with the people who run Western State Hospital, we've reached out to the governor's office, we of course have tried to intervene, and we will continue to do everything in our power to ensure Western State Hospital picks up its responsibility,” Manion said.</p> <p>A court found DSHS in contempt for failing to provide Jay with inpatient felony competency restoration treatment in June, ordering Jay to be paid \$250 a day starting in May. By our calculations, that's racking up a bill totaling roughly \$65,000.</p> <p>In the meantime, prosecutors say they'll keep fighting to keep Jay off the streets.</p>

	<p>“This is one of our top priorities, and we’re doing everything we can,” Manion said, “We recognize the harm this person caused, and we’re standing up for victims.”</p> <p>The Alexander Jay case is not unique to this issue; Manion says there are likely others across not only the county but the state in a similar position.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 King Co. prosecutor announces changes
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/king-countys-top-prosecutor-prioritizing-gun-violence-sexual-assault/
GIST	<p>King County’s new top prosecutor announced changes in her administration Tuesday, including a new gun violence-prevention unit and a new division of criminal practice focused on gender-based violence.</p> <p>Prosecuting Attorney Leesa Manion, who was sworn into office this month, prioritized prosecuting and preventing violent crimes and sexual assaults during a news conference Tuesday afternoon in the King County Courthouse.</p> <p>Manion announced the office will introduce a new gun violence-prevention unit that will not only focus on prosecuting people creating the “most harm,” but will also analyze data to identify people close to gun violence and connect them with community-based resources.</p> <p>Manion said the office plans to expand the efforts of a Harborview Medical Center pilot program that offers services to people who have been harmed by proximity to gun violence.</p> <p>The office also will create a new division focused on prosecuting and preventing gender-based violence by removing firearms from domestic violence situations and bringing a trauma-informed approach to the prosecution. Gender-based violence refers to violence rooted in exploiting unequal power relationships between genders, including cases involving rape, sexual assault and domestic violence.</p> <p>“Over the course of the past year, individuals have expressed a desire for the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office to be more timely and deliberate at how we address sexual assault and sexual violence, particularly in cases involving adult victims,” Manion said.</p> <p>She said she will reorganize the special assault unit into two practice areas: one focused exclusively on child victims and the other on adult victims.</p> <p>In 2022, the prosecutor’s office filed more than double the number of organized theft cases than it did in 2021, Manion said. She announced the creation of a new economic crimes and wage theft division focused on organized retail theft, wage theft and other economic crimes.</p> <p>A new felony traffic unit in the criminal division will focus on prosecuting serious felony traffic cases.</p> <p>“The purpose of this change is to underscore the importance and seriousness of vehicular homicide and assault cases and their devastating impacts on victims and survivors,” Manion said.</p> <p>With a backlog of 4,000 charged felony cases due to the pandemic, Manion said the office will prioritize violent crimes, sexual assault, gun crime and repeat property crime.</p> <p>The prosecutor’s office does not expect the volume of felony criminal cases to decrease due to new units and divisions.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Yakima: 3 killed in shooting; suspect dead
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/3-killed-in-shooting-at-yakima-convenience-store-suspect-at-large/

GIST

A tragic day in Yakima ended Tuesday afternoon when the suspect in an early morning triple homicide shot himself in the head, according to police.

Jarid Haddock, 21, was believed to have been the man who shot and killed three people at a Circle K convenience store in Yakima, resulting in a daylong search involving SWAT and other area police agencies.

That came to an end about 2:15 p.m., when responding police found him behind Target with a self-inflicted gunshot wound, Yakima Police Chief Matt Murray said. He was pronounced dead around 3:15 p.m. after receiving medical attention.

“And we don’t know how he got to this area,” Murray said.

Here’s what police said they do know:

- Haddock was in the Target parking lot when he asked a woman to use her phone. The woman overheard Haddock tell his mother in the call that he had killed people that morning, Murray said.
- The woman then called 911. She reported Haddock had been pacing through the parking lot, Murray said.
- Arriving police found him behind the store at 12 N. Fair Ave. with a gunshot wound. Medics tried to revive him. He later died.
- Haddock had a handgun and a lot of ammunition with him when police found him, Murray said.

After reviewing surveillance video and talking to witnesses, police still don’t know what led up to the morning killings, Murray said.

“He doesn’t get any money, he doesn’t try to take anything,” Murray said.

Three killed early Tuesday

The carnage began about 3 a.m. at 18th Street and Nob Hill Boulevard, when the suspect pulled up to the Arco ampm minimart and attempted to enter. The door was locked.

He then crossed the street to Circle K.

“He opens the door and starts shooting these people who are getting food,” Murray said.

The store clerk was in the back while the shooting occurred. He stayed there and called 911, according to a probable cause affidavit supporting the suspect’s arrest on charges of first-degree murder.

The suspect then stepped outside and shot and killed someone in a sport-utility vehicle in the parking lot, Murray said.

The suspect then went across the street to his own vehicle — which had his keys locked inside — shot the window out, entered and drove away, Murray said.

Earlier assumptions that the suspect shot someone and stole their car were false, Murray said.

Officers found a man in the Chevrolet Tahoe’s driver’s seat, identified in court documents as Jeffrey Howlett, 54, with multiple gunshot wounds.

Officers attempted first aid on Howlett, but he was pronounced dead at the scene.

Other officers found two people in the store who had been shot to death, the affidavit said. Court documents identified them as Nikki Godfrey, 40, and Roy Knoeb Jr., 65.

SWAT team across town

Around 7:10 a.m., a 911 caller said a family member was involved in the shooting, the affidavit said. Another person, identified as Haddock's mother, got on the phone and said that her son was involved and that his Chrysler Sebring was in the driveway with its driver's side window shot out, the affidavit said.

She said that she last saw her son at 1 a.m. when she said good night, the affidavit said, and that around 3:15 a.m. she got a text message from him saying he had locked himself out of his car at the Arco, the affidavit said. She was driving toward the Arco on East Nob Hill Boulevard when her husband called and said her son's car was in the driveway, the affidavit said.

After returning home, she called her son's name and, not hearing a response, left the house. She then learned about the shootings, the affidavit said.

She identified her son from the surveillance video from Circle K and said that he was a meth user for three years and that his habit had gotten worse in the past month, the affidavit said. She said he was acting "crazy" and had a black handgun and two long guns, including an AK-47-style rifle.

Yakima SWAT went to the house in the 3400 block of West Birchfield Road around 9 a.m. and surrounded it, using a loudspeaker multiple times to call Haddock out, and set off "flash-bang" grenades.

Murray said police weren't sure the suspect was inside. Police plan to search the residence after obtaining a search warrant, Murray said.

Court records show that Haddock completed a felony diversion in 2021 for charges of possessing a stolen motor vehicle and theft of a motor vehicle.

Yakima County Coroner Jim Curtice said autopsies will be performed on the three victims Wednesday and Thursday, and toxicology tests will be conducted on Haddock's blood.

Nob Hill scene

The Circle K where the shooting took place is one of four businesses at that intersection. The other three are an Arco, a 76 and a Chevron.

Daniel Bushman, a clerk at the ARCO across the street from the Circle K, said the ampm convenience store closed at 2 a.m. the day of the shooting. Though ampms usually operate 24 hours per day, Bushman said the store's owner started closing between 2 and 4 a.m. after a firearms-related incident at another Arco in Yakima.

Bushman wasn't there when Tuesday's shooting took place, and his store delayed opening until 9 a.m.

The owner of the Chevron facing the Circle K, Sukant Khullar, said his son opened the store at around 4 a.m., minutes after the shooting happened. The store closed quickly and did not open again until around 10 a.m., Khullar said.

The Yakima Police Department stopped by to take a look at video footage from the store's security camera, Khullar said.

"It's a gas station. We know these kinds of things can happen here," he said. "It's just reality."

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HEADLINE	01/24 Gunfire hits Puyallup officers amid standoff
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article271608412.html

GIST	<p>UPDATE 8:15 p.m.: The suspect has surrendered, Puyallup police tweeted. The shelter in place order has been lifted and residents can return home. East Main Avenue is now open.</p> <p>UPDATE 5:40 p.m.: Two Puyallup police officers have been shot, according to the Pierce County Sheriff's Department.</p> <p>UPDATE 4:35 p.m.: Puyallup police are still advising residents to shelter in place.</p> <p>Two Puyallup Police Department officers were shot and injured Tuesday afternoon while responding to a domestic violence investigation at an apartment building. The police response led to a standoff with a man who barricaded himself inside.</p> <p>Puyallup police were called to the River Trail Apartments at 1617 E. Main Ave. for the incident at about 1:17 p.m., and police said gunfire broke out a little more than an hour later. Sheriff's Department spokesperson Sgt. Darren Moss said the man would not cooperate with law enforcement and an exchange of gunfire occurred.</p> <p>A second round of gunfire occurred about 20 minutes later, Moss said. As of 5:40 p.m., no further shots have been fire.</p> <p>The man surrendered, Puyallup police tweeted at 8:15 p.m. He was placed into custody and transported to a local hospital.</p> <p>Earlier in the siege, police advised residents of River Trail Apartments and Addison Greens Apartments at 1715 E. Main Ave. to shelter in place and not leave their buildings. Others were told to avoid the area.</p> <p>The police officers who were struck were able to walk to an ambulance, Moss said. Their injuries were reportedly minor. At least one of the officers was taken to a local hospital for treatment.</p> <p>"I heard him on the air afterward saying that he could just walk himself up because they were trying to get an ambulance to him," Moss said. "He was like 'No I'll just walk over there,' so that's a good sign."</p> <p>It's unclear what the nature of the domestic violence incident was. Moss said no one else was in the apartment with the man, and the woman who called 911 was outside when police arrived. The Pierce County Sheriff's Department responded to assist.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Tragedy: 39 mass shootings in Jan already
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/24/tragedy-upon-tragedy-why-39-us-mass-shootings-already-this-year-is-just-the-start
GIST	<p>Two horrific killings separated by just a few days have shaken California, but such nightmarish mass shootings cannot be considered abnormal in the US. With a week still left in January, this year there have already been 39 mass shootings across the country, five of them in California.</p> <p>Reports from the Gun Violence Archive, a not-for-profit research group, show the predictability of American mass shootings. Nearly 70 people have been shot dead in mass shootings so far in 2023, according to their data – which classifies a mass shooting as any armed attack in which at least four people are injured or killed, not including the perpetrator.</p> <p>Broadened out to include all deaths from gun violence, not including suicides, 1,214 people have been killed before the end of the first month of this year, including 120 children. That is likely to increase to tens of thousands by the end of 2023 – the figure for 2022 is 20,200.</p> <p>In comparison, the latest data from the UK showed that in the course of an entire year ending in March 2022, 31 people were killed by firearms. The UK's population is 67 million to the US's 333 million.</p>

The [shooting in Monterey Park on Saturday](#), in which a 72-year-old Asian man is accused of killing 11 people in a lunar new year attack at a dance hall in a city close to Los Angeles, was notable as the deadliest US shooting in 2023, but not by much.

Just a few days into 2023, a [man in Utah fatally shot](#) his five children, his mother-in-law, and his wife and then turned the gun on himself.

And while US cable news networks were still reporting on the aftermath of the Monterey Park shooting on Monday, they had to cut away to a new mass killing, this time at a [school for at-risk young people in Des Moines, Iowa](#). Two students were killed and a teacher was injured.

Later that day, [seven people were killed in northern California](#) in an agricultural region on the outskirts of Half Moon Bay, a coastal community about 30 miles south of San Francisco. It was the most recent mass shooting – the 38th – for just a few hours, before [two people were killed and three injured](#) in Chicago.

The California governor, Gavin Newsom, was at the time meeting victims of the Monterey Bay massacre in a hospital but said he got pulled away from their bedside “to be briefed about another shooting”.

“Tragedy upon tragedy,” [he wrote on Twitter](#).

The pace of the killings makes it hard to keep up. Eight days ago, six people, including a 17-year-old mother and her six-month-old baby, [were killed in another mass shooting](#), also in California.

Despite claims by the US gun lobby and their powerful political backers, little connects these shootings in terms of the killers’ background or mental health. Instead, the connection is the ready availability of deadly weapons – and that is what differentiates the US from most other advanced countries.

Americans [bought an estimated 150m guns](#) in the past decade, with [sales increasing, especially during the pandemic](#). There are more guns in the US than people, according to a 2018 [Small Arms Survey report](#), which found the country had the highest rate of firearm ownership in the world, and more than double the next country on the list, Yemen.

Expectations for further gun-control legislation in Congress are low, with largely pro-gun Republicans in control of the House of Representatives.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Moon Bay killings ‘workplace violence’
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/killings-7-half-moon-bay-labeled-act-workplace-violence-rcna67183
GIST	<p>The slayings of seven people, gunned down in a small Northern California city, was an act of "workplace violence" that victimized members of the "migrant community," officials said Tuesday.</p> <p>Suspect Chunli Zhao, a 66-year-old resident of Half Moon Bay, worked at Mountain Mushroom Farm, one of two agricultural businesses where workers were killed on Monday afternoon, authorities said.</p> <p>“The only known connection between the victims and the suspect is that they may have been co-workers,” San Mateo County Sheriff Christina Corpus told reporters in nearby Redwood City. "All of the evidence we have points to this being the instance of workplace violence."</p> <p>Five of the fatally wounded victims were men, Corpus said at a later news conference. Two were women. A man who was hospitalized with life-threatening wounds Monday was in stable condition, she said.</p> <p>Zhao was arrested in the parking lot of a sheriff’s substation in Half Moon Bay shortly after the attacks.</p> <p>“The semi-automatic handgun was legally purchased and owned,” Corpus said.</p>

Sheriff's investigators also said they're struggling to notify loved ones of victims who were described as "members of the migrant community," who were of Asian and Hispanic descent.

"As some of these victims were members of our migrant community, this represents a unique challenge when it comes to notifications (of survivors) and identifications," Corpus said.

Robert Tripp, special agent in charge of the FBI's San Francisco field office, said the agency provided technical and forensic support in the shooting's aftermath. The bureau was transitioning to providing victims' services, he said.

While investigators did not immediately disclose what, if any, criminal record Zhao might have, it didn't rise to any level of significant concern, officials said.

"I will say there were no specific indicators that would have led us to believe that he was capable of something like this and he was not known to us," sheriff's Capt. Eamonn Allen said.

Zhao, who investigators had originally said was 67, is scheduled to make his first court appearance on Wednesday afternoon.

District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe called Monday's attack the worst in San Mateo County history.

"We've never had one in this county of this many deaths ... at one time," the prosecutor said. "So it's a very hectic scene."

The scenic coastal city of roughly 11,000 is known for its farms — there are more than 100 in the area, according to state Sen. Josh Becker, whose district includes Half Moon Bay — and many people from out of town visit for its winter squash.

"Many of you come here for pumpkins and ignore the farm workers," Half Moon Bay Vice Mayor Joaquin Jimenez told reporters Tuesday. "Not today."

California Gov. Gavin Newsom recalled speaking to migrants from China who saw the shooting but didn't understand what they were witnessing.

"They thought they were acting," Newsom said. "They'd never heard a sound like that. They'd never seen a scene like that. They didn't know how to comprehend a gunshot wound."

"Only in America do we see this kind of carnage," he added.

President Joe Biden offered prayers for the victims and said in a statement: "For the second time in recent days, California communities are mourning the loss of loved ones in a senseless act of gun violence."

The Half Moon Bay slayings were in the middle of a horrific 72-hour period of gun violence across California and the nation.

- A man in [Monterey Park](#), an Asian-majority suburb of Los Angeles, gunned down 11 people at a Lunar New Year dance party late Saturday night, authorities said.
- A dozen people were [wounded early Sunday morning](#) when gunfire erupted in a [Baton Rouge, Louisiana, bar](#), police said.
- [Two students](#), 18 and 16, were gunned down Monday afternoon at a charter school in Des Moines, Iowa, that's tailored for disadvantaged youths and has close ties to police, authorities said. An 18-year-old was arrested and faces two counts of murder.
- Less than five hours after the Half Moon Bay shootings began, gunfire erupted [40 miles away in Oakland](#) where [one person was killed and seven were injured](#), police said.
- Three people [were gunned down](#) early Tuesday morning at a Circle K convenience store in Yakima, Washington, officials said. A 21-year-old suspect was [found dead Tuesday](#).

HEADLINE	01/24 Monterey Park shooter hopeless, desperate
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/monterey-park-shooter-was-mad-world-not-just-ex-former-friends-say-rcna67331
GIST	<p>SAN GABRIEL, Calif. — The elderly gunman responsible for the dance hall massacre in Monterey Park was out of step with other Asian immigrants who found joy and companionship in venues like the Star Ballroom Dance Studio, former friends said.</p> <p>Huu Can Tran, 72, was an angry loner who appeared to have a grudge against the world — not just his ex-wife — people he crossed paths with said Tuesday.</p> <p>“I think his whole life was going down,” said a man who used to rent an apartment from Tran and asked that his name not be used because he did not want to be associated with the gunman.</p> <p>“He had no job, he sold his property, very few friends, and I believe that he had no close friends,” said the man, who added that he spoke with Tran daily at the time. “No family, no kids, no job, no money. He was hopeless and desperate.”</p> <p>While police have struggled to come up with a motive for the bloodshed, they speculated that Tran may have been gunning for his ex-wife when he barged into the Star Ballroom on Saturday and opened fire. The former tenant said he doubts Tran was targeting her.</p> <p>“They have been divorced for nearly 20 years,” the friend said. “His ex-wife also likes to dance, so, many times, they would bump into each other in the party or at events. I don’t think his ex-wife was the cause of his massacre.”</p> <p>Nevertheless, Tran often blamed his ex-wife for the demise of his trucking business. Records show that Tran registered a business called Tran’s Trucking in Monterey Park in 2002 and that it was dissolved two years later.</p> <p>“His ex-wife talked him into closing the business, and he sold the truck,” the man said.</p> <p>Tran died by suicide as police were closing in on his getaway van 12 hours after he fatally shot 11 people and wounded nine more at Star Ballroom. He later invaded the Lai Lai Ballroom & Studio in nearby Alhambra but was disarmed by Brandon Tsay, 26, and fled.</p> <p>Tran, the friend said, was also on the outs with the dance hall patrons at both venues and especially with some of the dance instructors.</p> <p>“He always complained that instructors were speaking evil about him or trying to do something bad about him,” the friend said. “I’m not quite sure if those things were true, but he always complained. He thought those instructors were not friendly to him, tried to sort of expel him from the group.”</p> <p>The man said he had lived in an apartment complex owned by Tran for seven to nine years. He said they stopped speaking in 2015 when he moved out and Tran refused to pay back the man’s security deposit.</p> <p>The dispute was settled in small claims court, where the judge sided with the tenant, court records show.</p> <p>Most recently, Tran lived in the Los Angeles exurb of Hemet, but he previously called San Gabriel home. The mostly Asian city is about a 10-minute drive from Monterey Park.</p> <p>A former neighbor, who also asked not to be identified by name, said they lived across the street from each other for about two decades on a modest street in a neighborhood that was once predominantly Italian and is now largely Asian and Latino.</p>

Tran, the person said, was quiet and polite and mostly kept to himself. At the time, Tran went by "Andy" and ran a rug-cleaning business, sometimes cleaning his neighbors' carpets for free, the former neighbor said.

While he was not wealthy, Tran was able to afford an old Rolls-Royce that he kept parked in his driveway, the person said. He also recalled seeing a white van parked on the modest property, not unlike the one in which Tran died.

But his clearest memory of Tran was waking up 15 years ago to the sounds of Tran and a woman he knew only by sight arguing in the street.

"You could see the plates flying," the neighbor said. "The plates were crashing into the street, and he was yelling at her."

And every weekend, Tran could be seen coming out of his house dressed in his finest clothing, the former neighbor said.

"He was always going out to dance," he said. "Otherwise, we didn't see him much."

Tran's latest address was at The Lakes at Hemet West, a gated "active living community" for people over age 55.

Police have been searching the property for clues since Sunday and have not come up with an explanation for Tran's turn to violence.

"What drove a madman to do this? We don't know, but we intend to find out," Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said earlier.

Tran was once arrested for unlawful possession of a firearm in 1990, Luna said, but otherwise his record was clean.

He also contacted Hemet police this month, alleging his family [tried to poison him 10 to 20 years ago](#). The allegation was never investigated, police said, because Tran never presented any proof to back up his claims.

Laurence Steinberg, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Temple University in Philadelphia, said Tran does not fit the typical profile of a mass shooter.

"We know from FBI data that the peak age for violent crime in the U.S. is around 19 or 20, and that has stayed pretty constant over the years," Steinberg said in a statement. "So this seems to be a period of development when there is greater risk for people to commit violent acts."

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HEADLINE	01/25 Secret Service: trends in mass attacks
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/one-quarter-mass-attackers-conspiracy-theories-hate-rcna67298
GIST	<p>Following the latest string of mass shootings in the U.S., the Secret Service published a 60-page report Wednesday detailing trends in mass attacks in public spaces to share patterns with community leaders who could help prevent the next tragedy.</p> <p>Among the findings: Although a personal grievance of some sort was the single most common motive, one-quarter of the attackers studied from 2016 to 2020 were motivated by conspiracy theories or hateful ideologies.</p> <p>The agency, known for protecting presidents, has established a National Threat Assessment Center to monitor trends in violence that could threaten the people it protects, as well as the public.</p>

	<p>The report details 173 attacks that hurt three or more people in public spaces, including churches and schools, from 2016 to 2020. Lina Alathari, the chief of the Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center, said the trends could help community leaders know what red flags to spot before someone carries out the next mass attack.</p> <p>Hateful ideologies that motivated attackers included anti-government, antisemitic or misogynistic views. The authors also found nearly one-third of all attackers had evidence of planning their attacks.</p> <p>The typical attacker was a 34-year-old man motivated by personal grievances, rather than ideology, the report says.</p> <p>Alathari said the grievances could be “perceived wrongs, most often related to personal issues, maybe health or financial issues, workplace issues, as well as issues with family and romantic partners.”</p> <p>“We really have to be looking at how can we resolve these interpersonal grievances ... to make sure they don't escalate,” Alathari told NBC News.</p> <p>More than three-quarters of all attacks involved firearms, and over 80% of attacks that used guns resulted in at least one death, the report found. Most of the attackers used handguns, but one-third used “long guns,” a category that includes automatic and semi-automatic weapons. Attackers who used weapons other than guns fatally wounded victims in fewer than 50% of attacks.</p> <p>In over one-quarter of all mass shootings, the attackers possessed firearms illegally.</p> <p>Asked whether the trends called for gun reform, Alathari said, “Our research informs policy, and we really hope communities take preventative action to make sure that they are mitigating any possible risk of a tragedy like this happening again.”</p>
Return to Top	Click on link to download report: https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/usss-ntac-maps-2016-2020.pdf

HEADLINE	01/24 Vandalism fires disrupt Paris train network
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/paris-trains-canceled-after-scandalous-act-vandalism-96630359
GIST	<p>PARIS -- Apparently deliberately set blazes to clusters of electrical cables caused cascading cancellations on the Paris train network Tuesday, all but shutting down services at one of the French capital's busiest stations.</p> <p>Two fires damaged 48 cables, Transport Minister Clément Beaune said, describing it as “an act that is scandalous.” The national rail operator, SNCF, said the cables powered signals for trains on the network. It filed a legal complaint, calling the overnight damage deliberate.</p> <p>The motives for the apparent vandalism were unknown. But it largely shut down Gare de l'Est, a station that generally links Paris to cities and towns in the east, including in neighboring countries. SNCF said the circulation of high-speed trains and slower regional trains to and from the station was suspended, with only services on three lines spared.</p> <p>SNCF said repair crews were working to restore the affected lines. But it also warned that services at the station, which is used daily by hundreds of thousands of passengers, could be suspended throughout Tuesday.</p>
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